

# Immigrants & Community

**Grade Level:** Middle School (6th-8th grades)

**Goal:** To teach middle school students about various types of community and about how immigrants contribute to the communities of which they are a part. Through literacy-based activities, students will increase their knowledge of the countries of origin of some immigrants to the United States, of reasons for immigration, and of some ways immigrants adjust to life in the United States.

**Objectives:** Students will develop their skills in discussion, in reading, and in responding to literature. Specifically, students will:

- Discuss the concept of community to include specific communities like neighborhoods, schools and institutions.
- Read the novel *Seedfolks*, by Paul Fleishman
- Keep a journal on important elements of the novel.
- Create a map of the community garden portrayed in the novel.
- Research the countries of origin of various characters in the novel and learn about reasons for immigration.
- Participate in a culminating activity

**Materials:** selected books; pictures of a community garden; computer with access to the Internet; art media (e.g. markers, construction paper, paint); sight for a garden and garden supplies including seeds and/or seedlings or vegetables and other foodstuff.

**Procedure:** Introduce the concept of community by discussing ways people form groups around common interests. Discuss different types of communities (e.g. neighborhoods, schools, social clubs, religious groups and institutions, social action groups). Identify the common interests around which these communities form (e.g. Neighborhoods are communities with specified physical borders. Schools are communities where adults and children share the common interest of learning.). Share examples of local immigrant communities. Discuss reasons why immigrants might form communities in their new countries.

Share pictures of a community garden. Discuss the common interest or interests of people who participate in this type of communal activity. Share pictures of community gardens and farmers markets.

Read the book *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman. The book may be read aloud to reinforce the oral storytelling style of the novel. Reading a few chapters at a time will allow the opportunity for discussion and other activities. Teachers can develop questions to encourage discussion of the characters, setting, and themes in the novel. Since many of the characters in the novel are immigrants, the teacher may focus on how the garden helped characters adjust to life in their new community.

As students read the novel, they can keep a journal in which they note the vegetables that are planted and the characters' motivations for joining the garden. Students might also write about how each character benefits from the garden and how they, in turn, give to the garden community. When students finish the novel, have them plot a map of the garden to include: where each character lives in relation to the garden, where and what each character planted, where and what other characters mentioned in the novel planted, and any other relevant details.

Using the Internet and other resources, have students research different characters' countries of origin. (Note that not all characters in the novel are immigrants.) Discuss different reasons for immigration (e.g. for jobs, to join family, to find refuge from war or persecution). Discuss reasons characters in the novel may have immigrated. Next, discuss how characters in the novel have adjusted to life in the United States. Point out both positive and negative adjustments. Finally, have students develop profiles of the characters that include information about countries of origin, possible reasons for immigration, and adjustment to life in the United States.

As a culminating project, students might try starting a small school garden, planting some of the plants mentioned in the novel. If weather and/or space does not permit a large-scale garden project, students may plan a "harvest" party in which they bring in vegetables mentioned in the novel. Students might also visit a community garden or fresh produce market (a Farmers' Market).

**Assessment:** For each student compile a portfolio to include: journal entries, garden map, and character profiles. Quizzes or tests may also be given to assess students' knowledge of material in the unit.

# **We Are Americans: Voices of The Immigrant Experience**

**Grade Level:** Middle School (6th-8th grades)

**Goal:** To teach students about the history of immigration through the voices and experiences of the immigrants.

**Objectives:** Students will:

- Study the specific immigration histories of various groups, their roles in and contribution to American society
- Compare and contrast immigration histories of various groups
- Expand research and critical thinking skills
- Examine primary source materials to expand knowledge of immigration history and process
- Write personal and bibliographical narratives

**Materials:**

- Six copies of *We Are Americans: Voices Of The Immigrant Experience*, by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, Scholastic Nonfiction, 2003.
- Access to the Internet.

**Procedure:** Begin the unit with a discussion of immigration. Use some of the following discussion points:

- Ask students what they know of their own personal immigration history.
- Who was the first person in the family to immigrate to America? Who was the most recent immigrant? Where did they come from? Why did they come? How did they come? What do they know about the immigration experience of their family members? What kind of work did they do in their old country? What work did they do in America? Where did they first arrive? Where did they settle? Why?
- Ask students if they know any recent immigrants. What do they know of their stories?
- Do they know any famous immigrants? Start a class list of famous immigrants

Divide class into six groups of four to five students. Give each group a copy of *We Are Americans*. Read and discuss the introduction with the class.

Have students peruse the book and discuss the various materials presented: photos, artifacts, narratives, drawings, portraits, pamphlets, documents, etc.

Discuss primary source materials. What are they? Where do we find them? What is their value and use?

Assign each group two consecutive chapters in the book to read and research. Students will use their reading and research as a basis for some of the following activities.

## Activities:

### 1. In Their Own Words

Students will:

- read first person accounts of immigration in the book
- compare immigration stories
- research the history of that immigrant group
- write a bibliographical narrative about the person including historical research
- illustrate the narratives

### 2. Letters As Ads

Based on reading and research, students will write a letter in the voice of an immigrant to friends and family “advertising” his/her experiences in America. Create a picture either by drawing or with a digital camera to “send” with the letter. Display letters and illustrations on a class bulletin board.

### 3. How Did They Come Here?

Compare and contrast immigration histories and experiences of different groups.

Use the internet to research and compare the experience of the passengers on the ships Golden Venture and St. Louis in their attempts to come to America.

### 4. Jigsaw Timeline

Use the book to create a visual time line of American immigration.

Have each group create a chart for each of the chapters they were assigned, displaying the time period covered, the groups who came to America in that time, the number of people who came and the world events that had an impact on immigration in that time. Students might also include famous people who immigrated in that time period.

Display the charts in chronological order around the classroom

### 5. What Story Does The Picture Tell?

Have students choose a picture or photo from the book to use as the prompt for a story or poem about the immigration history of the subject.

### 6. Port of Entry

Have students research the two most famous ports of entry to the United States, Ellis Island on the east coast and Angel Island on the west. Compare and contrast the experiences of the immigrants who passed through them.

### 7. In The News

National and world events had a great impact on immigration and immigration policy and law. For example: the Louisiana Purchase, World War II, pogroms in Eastern Europe, the Irish Potato Famine, the Gold Rush, the building of Transcontinental Railroad, the war in Viet Nam, the events of 9/11, etc. Using the Internet and news sources, have students research current immigration issues. From what parts of the world are people emigrating today? What factors are causing them to immigrate? How is this impacting on American society and immigration policy?

#### 8. Surprising Immigration Facts

One third of Washington's soldiers were immigrants. The first Asian immigrants were from the Philippines. The first illegal immigrants were Africans brought over after the slave trade was abolished in 1807. Create a bulletin board of surprising immigration facts and add to it as students discover them in the course of their research.

#### 9. Famous American Immigrants

Have students choose a famous immigrant to research and present to the class. Create a "postage stamp" for the person showing their image and contribution to their adopted country. Create a "wall of fame" using these images and biographies students write about them.

#### 10. Naturalization

Have students research the process to become an American citizen. How and why has that process changed over the course of our history? What are the laws for citizenship in other countries?

#### 11. Class Museum of Immigration

The objects and pictures carried on the journey to America held great meaning for immigrants and their families. Invite students to bring such items to school, or to create facsimiles, and write the history of the item and its meaning for the family. Create a classroom display of the objects and stories. Invite parents and other classes to visit the class "museum"

#### **Assessment:**

Have students create a portfolio of their work from the unit including research, journals, writing, presentations, quizzes, and tests.