

# Asian Immigrants & Refugees

## A 1st-8th Grade Instructional Unit

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Fall 2014

### Unit Overview

This instructional unit begins with an introductory lesson about immigration and refugees that can be modified to fit the needs of any elementary or middle school class. Afterward, teachers can use the [annotated biographies listed by topic](#) with accompanying reading levels to determine the picture and/or chapter books that best meet their classroom needs. Some lesson designs and book activities are suggested by grade level to provide general guidance.

This unit integrates social studies content with language arts skills such as reading for comprehension, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, and drawing conclusions. These lessons are in alignment with Dimension 2, Perspectives, of the National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civil Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2013).

### Historical Background

Asians began settling in what is now the United States over 250 years ago. In fact, the first pieces of American immigration legislation were created specifically to exclude Asians from entry. At the same time, American corporations and business owners were desperate for cheap labor and were actively recruiting workers from various Asian countries.

As more Asian workers arrived in the U.S. mainland and Hawaii, anti-Asian sentiment began to fester in the late 1800s, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Dozens of court cases illustrate the struggle of Asian immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s trying to gain citizenship and to fight against discriminatory and racist practices. Japanese internment during World War II and the Second Red Scare/McCarthyism positioned Asian immigrants as threats outside of mainstream American society. Yet by the 1960s, East Asian immigrants were positioned by the media as the Model Minority - a high achieving "race" whose community members pulled themselves up by their bootstraps without federal assistance and were able to lead successful, ideal lives. This stereotype, which is not only a myth but also highly problematic in the way that it compares and contrasts Asians to other minority groups in the U.S., continues to be perpetuated today both in and out of school settings.

Adding complexity to these social perceptions of immigrants was the massive change in immigration law that occurred in 1965. With preferential treatment given to family reunification and professional workers, people in Asia, Latin America and Africa were no longer constrained by tiny national quotas. Asian immigration to America swelled and continued to grow over time, in part due to Southeast Asian refugees arriving due to U.S. intervention in the region as

well as visas facilitating the immigration of skilled tech workers from China, Korea, and India. Before 1965, the U.S. admitted Asians only for specific purposes and created exclusions as it saw necessary.

In spite of this long multifaceted history, Asian immigrant experiences are rarely taught in schools, which instead tend to focus solely on Ellis Island and its Western European immigrants. It is critical that schools begin and sustain conversations about other immigrant groups who have contributed to the development of the United States and continue to shape our country and culture today.

Here are several timelines of Asian American history that may guide student understanding of the different waves of immigration from various Asian countries/groups to the United States:

<http://www.cetel.org/timeline.html>

<http://www.angelatsai.com/aaldef/site/timeline.html#>

[http://www.advancingjustice-chicago.org/sites/chicago/files/compas\\_aahistoricaltimeline\\_1.pdf](http://www.advancingjustice-chicago.org/sites/chicago/files/compas_aahistoricaltimeline_1.pdf)

<http://www.routledge.com/cw/lee-9780415879545/s1/students/>

[http://www.flowofhistory.org/themes/movement\\_settlement/uspolicytimeline.php](http://www.flowofhistory.org/themes/movement_settlement/uspolicytimeline.php)

## Lesson Plans

### Grades 1-2

Begin with a discussion about who “gets” to come to America. What are some reasons that a person should be allowed to enter and what are some reasons that might justify denying entry? Discuss some of the potential problems around these questions and who might be the best people to make decisions about entry.

Then consider the word *immigrant* using a concept map/web/other graphic organizer to determine what students already know about the topic. Then provide a separate concept map/web/graphic organizer for the word *refugee* (or combine with Venn diagram). It’s likely that *immigrant* will be more familiar than *refugee*, so distinguish the two terms as well as identify what they have in common. Some major points to cover:

- *Immigrants* move from one place to another with the intention of staying in the new place. Usually this move is done on purpose with some level of planning involved – luggage/home items are packed, transportation/housing are arranged in advance, family members are notified, etc.
- *Refugees* move from one place to another because of a threat to their life, such as a natural disaster (typhoon, hurricane, earthquake), war, crime, or politics. Because of the threat of imminent danger, refugees will likely not be able to plan their move with much time, resources, or certainty. This can result in the movement from one place/country to another, sometimes staying in refugee camps or other temporary shelter with limited resources. It also means that they may not have many personal items with them and may not know their final destination.

Consider allowing students to explore some of the emotions that immigrants and refugees may face as they prepare to move, as they move, and then once they arrive in a new place. Students may want to share their own experiences visiting an unfamiliar place. Use a globe as a reference tool, and ask students if they know any immigrants or refugees and locate their countries of origin and demonstrate the journey from that country to the United States.

The following day, discuss how people have come to America from many different places. This unit will focus on people who have come to the United States from the continent of Asia (indicate on globe) under different circumstances. Students will be asked to determine whether each story describes an immigrant or a refugee and what evidence they have from the text that supports their thinking.

Use the annotated bibliography provided to select at least one text about an Asian immigrant and at least one text about an Asian refugee. Read one book per session, taking group or individual notes about the characters' experiences leaving their homes. Ask students to determine if the book is about an immigrant or a refugee and provide at least three pieces of evidence from the text. A summary worksheet is provided at the end of the document.

### **Grades 3-5**

Begin with a discussion about coming to America. What are some reasons that a person should be allowed to enter and what are some reasons that might justify denying entry? Who would be responsible for making these decisions and what rules could be created to enforce them? Discuss some potential problems and possible solutions. You may want to refer to one of the immigration policy timelines included at the beginning of this document to illustrate changes in U.S. immigration laws over time.

Write the following words in the middle of three concept maps/webs: *migrant*, *immigrant*, *refugee*. Ask students if they know what any of the words mean and in what context they have heard each word. Students may connect migrant to migration and consequently to scientific understandings of migration related to animals, butterflies, etc. This could tie into a conversation about migrant farm workers following crops during harvest season, moving from one area or state to another. The major concepts that should arise from this vocabulary discussion are:

- *Migrants* move from one place to another. Their movement can be within boundaries (from one city to another within the same state) or across them (from one country to another), but they do not stay in any place permanently. Ask students what factors might facilitate migration, especially frequent migration.
- *Immigrants* move from one place to another with the intention of settling in the new place. Usually this move is intentional with some level of planning involved – luggage/home items are packed, transportation/housing are arranged in advance, family members are notified, jobs may be secured, etc.
- *Refugees* move from one place to another because of a threat to their life, such as a natural disaster (typhoon, hurricane, earthquake), war, crime, or politics. Because of the threat of

imminent danger, refugees will likely not be able to plan their move with much time, resources, or certainty. This can result in the movement from one place/country to another, sometimes staying in refugee camps or other temporary shelter with limited resources. It also means that they may not have many personal items with them and may not know exactly their final destination.

Frequently students will rationalize movement from one place to another, under any of the above terms, as people searching for a better life. It is important to remind them that many times this is the case, but there are also other specific reasons that people leave their homes – war, threat of danger/death, natural disasters, financial need, political climate, etc. – and that sometimes the destination is not friendly, welcoming, or comfortable for all arrivals. Ask students to consider some barriers that might make life in a new place difficult; they will likely think of not having any friends, not knowing where places are, etc. but may also consider aspects like language, religion, clothing, weather, shelter, food, and appearance that might differ from one place to another. For young children, it may help to associate some emotion words to each term regarding how children in each situation might feel.

The following day, discuss how people have come to America from many different places. This unit will focus on people who have come to the United States from the continent of Asia (indicate on globe) under different circumstances. Students will be asked to determine whether each story describes an immigrant or a refugee and what evidence they have from the text that supports their thinking.

Use the annotated bibliography provided to select at least one text about an Asian immigrant and at least one text about an Asian refugee. Read one book per session, taking group or individual notes about the characters' experiences leaving their homes. Ask students to determine if the book is about an immigrant or a refugee and provide at least three pieces of evidence from the text. If sufficient copies are available, students can also read longer texts in book clubs and then share summaries with the whole class about their different books.

### **Grades 4 & 7 (Texas History)**

Ask students if they can think of any famous ports where immigrants who came to America were processed. They will likely only be familiar with Ellis Island. Ask students if they have heard of or visited Galveston, Texas. The immigration station at Galveston opened in 1913 at Pelican Island and was second only to Ellis Island in its size and features. However it was only open for three years and closed permanently during WWI. A new federal immigration station at Galveston Island opened in 1933.

Students can use *Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America Through Galveston Island* resources online and in the educator guide as well and conduct online research to learn about different Asian American groups that immigrated to Texas via Galveston. Irwin Tang's *Asian Texans* (2008) is an adult resource that may provide helpful information about specific groups; p. 72-80 of the *Forgotten Gateway* guide contain an excerpt from Tang's book.

## **Grades 6-8**

Begin with a discussion about coming to America. What are some reasons that a person should be allowed to enter and what are some reasons that might justify denying entry? Who would be responsible for making these decisions and what rules could be created to enforce them? Discuss some potential problems and possible solutions. You may want to refer to one of the immigration policy timelines included at the beginning of this document to illustrate changes in U.S. immigration laws over time.

Determine students' understanding of the terms *immigrant* and *refugee*. This can be done in a variety of ways, including the use of individual/group/whole class concept maps or through active paired discussions where students define one term then switch partners and define the next term, culminating in a whole group discussion of what pairs shared together. Students could also begin by looking up the definitions of each word, compose scenarios about fictional or real people coming to America, then share scenarios with large groups or the whole class to determine if each scenario describes an immigrant or a refugee. Once definitions have been established, students can be assigned or may self-select different topics about the Asian immigration experience.

Once topics are designated, students can work in small study groups or book clubs reading either the same text or books with a common topic. For a faster approach over a shorter length of time, utilize texts such as the elementary-level picture books listed in the annotated bibliographies. Otherwise, the books listed as middle school level are generally novels that might take at least a week for students to read then discuss with peers. For each text, students should consider the push and pull factors that led to U.S. immigration. If time allows, students can research pertinent global events mentioned in the texts they read and could choose 3-5 key historical images that add context to the topic of the book. Some possible project-based learning assessments include designing a book jacket, creating a newspaper or poster, or making a slideshow or scrapbook that includes a variety of relevant primary and secondary sources such as film, photos, songs, etc.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**Author** \_\_\_\_\_

This story is about \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I think the main character in this book is a (circle one)

**immigrant/refugee** because:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

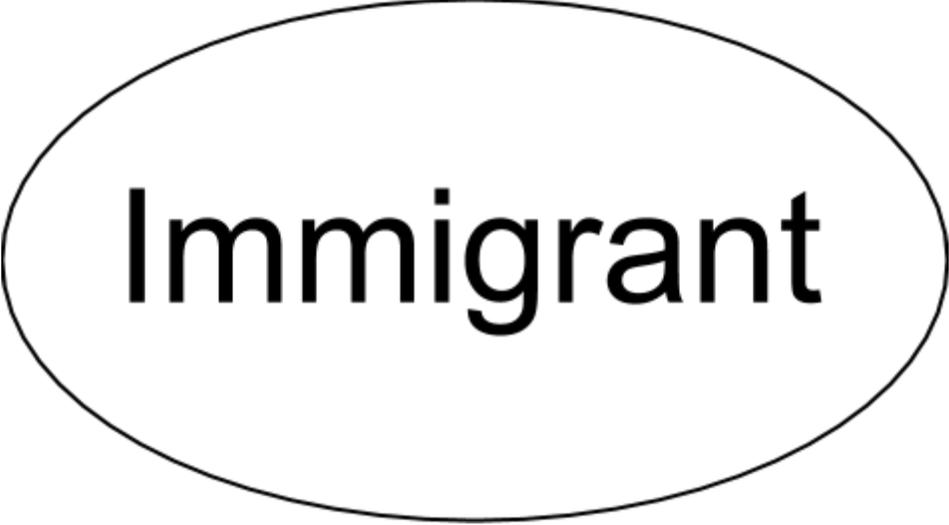
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

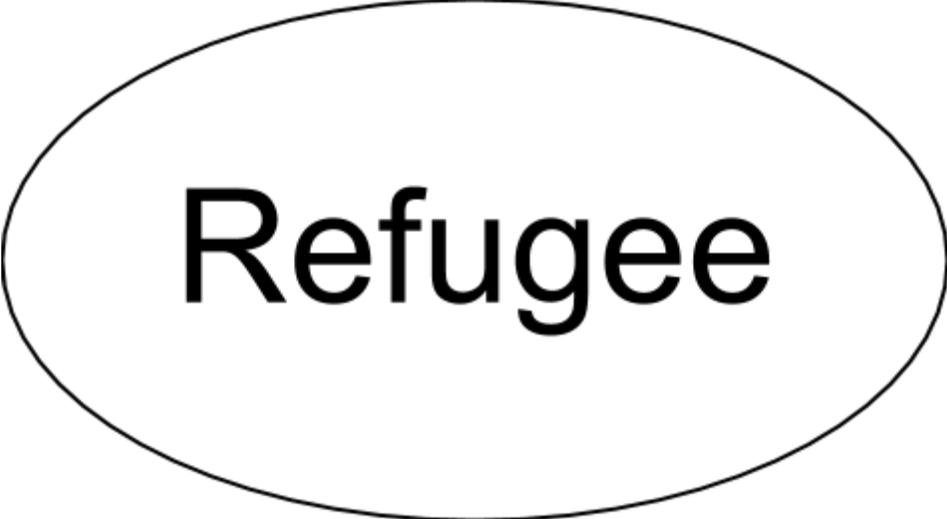
I think the character feels \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

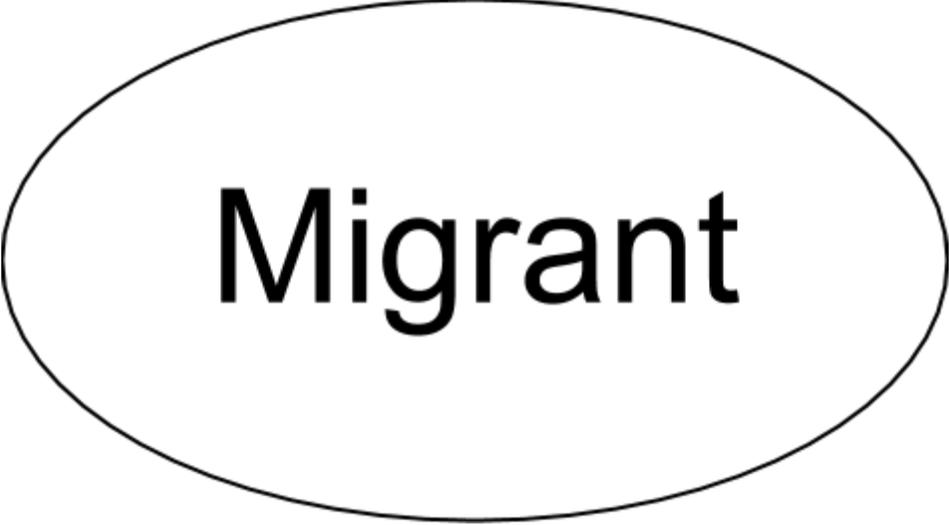
\_\_\_\_\_



**Immigrant**



Refugee



**Migrant**