

## **Immigration to the United States**

According to the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, Minnesota is the state with the largest Somali population in the United States and is second in the nation behind California in Hmong population. Foreign-born people represent 6.8% of the population in the state and 103 different languages and dialects are spoken in the homes of Minnesota's K-12 students as reported by the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights. Minnesota is one of the fastest changing states in the nation when it comes to immigration, making it an applicable topic to our students. Not only is immigration a current topic to study, but it is the entire story of our country: the United States is almost entirely a nation of immigrants. By studying immigration through literature and other texts in the ninth grade, students will continue to learn about diverse cultures and how these cultures have assimilated and added to the culture of America. Students will understand the challenges faced by immigrants as well as gain an appreciation for their own family background. This text set includes a history of immigration to the United States, a variety of texts showing viewpoints from different cultures, and current news in immigration.

**Chao, Adam and Spencer, Dan. (DATE). *Immigration: The living mosaic of people, culture & hope*. Retrieved October 13, 2007 from <http://library.thinkquest.org/20619/index.html>**

This website provides information on the history of immigration in the United States. Even before the United States was founded, people have been flocking to the U.S. as a place with opportunities abound and freedom for all. This site includes a timeline of immigration to America, stories from real people in the past and present and their experience with immigration, information on the Statue of Liberty, a segment about Ellis Island, and specialized sections about immigration including immigration by the English, Italian, Irish, African, German, Japanese, Chinese, and Jewish. I decided to include this as a part of my text set because the history of immigration is important for students to understand that a majority of their own heritages lead back to immigration. It is especially important to take this into consideration when thinking of the current immigration situation in the United States. Students are also very technology-minded, so a website will catch their attention and encourage them to learn about immigration. According to the SMOG readability test, the texts from various parts of this website are at a ninth grade reading level.

**Cisneros, Sandra. (1989). *The House on Mango Street* (pp. 12-13, 28, 76-78). New York: Random House, Inc.**

*The House on Mango Street* is a collection of vignettes from the point of view of a child who brings valuable insight to the topic of immigration. Instead of having students read the entire book, I chose three vignettes that fit the topic best. In "Cathy Queen of Cats," narrator Esperanza is looking for a friend, which she finds in Cathy, a girl who owns many cats. Cathy has a French heritage and is proud to think that one day she and her father will go to France to

“find her great great distant grand cousin on her father’s side and inherit the family house” (13). The main idea of the vignette is that Cathy is moving away from the Mango Street because her family thinks the “neighborhood is getting bad” (13). Cathy doesn’t realize when telling her that Esperanza has just moved in and is a part of the people who are making the neighborhood bad. “Those Who Don’t” is a very short vignette about the people who come to Esperanza’s neighborhood and are scared to be there. She, on the other hand, feels completely safe in her “all brown all around” neighborhood. When she goes into a neighborhood of another color, however, she is scared just the same as the people who come from outside into her neighborhood. The last vignette I chose from the book is “No Speak English,” the story of a man who came to America without his wife and child. He worked to save money and get her to the U.S., but she doesn’t speak English. As her son begins to learn the language, the essay explores the family dynamic when each member of a family speaks at a different level in different languages within one family unit.

I’ve included this piece to provide one culture’s perspective of immigration and the challenges that culture faces in America. Esperanza is Mexican American, but many members of her family and many characters in the book are first-generation immigrants to America. I also thought it was important to work in a piece of fiction that still brought out real immigration issues, which this piece successfully does. The piece is also unique because it is from the perspective of a young person. The readability with the SMOG method is at a level 4, which is low for a high school reader, but the book is commonly used in the high school classroom. Although easier to read, the vignettes in the book have mature themes about immigration, culture and assimilation.

**Anonymous. (2007, October 16). McCain’s reminder; Senator points to our immigration tradition. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, pp B-6**

This editorial talks about some political issues that surround immigration. Most people want to stop illegal immigration and others want to stop legal immigration as well for the next 5-10 years. The author reminds us that the nation didn’t become successful by locking out immigrants, but by welcoming “the best, bravest, most ambitious and most optimistic individuals in the world -- as long as they came legally.” The article ends with some commentary about and support of John McCain and his stance on immigration. I’ve included this piece as an opinion piece from a newspaper, so that students can respond in one way or another as they gain more knowledge about immigration. It gives information, but also provides a venue for me to bring in media literacy as well, since it is coming from the opinion section of the newspaper. The readability of the article is hard to determine because of its length, but if I tried to use the smog method it would result in a high college level. This would be inaccurate because of the repeated use of the word *immigration*, but as it is published in a newspaper, it should be at a level that a high school student can understand.

**Lee, Li-Young. (1990). *The City in Which I Love You* (pp. 41-42). New York: BOA Editions, Ltd.**

Li-Young Lee was born to Chinese parents in 1957 in Jakarta, Indonesia. After his father spent a year in an Indonesian prison camp, the Lee family fled the country to escape anti-Chinese sentiment in 1959. His family moved from Hong Kong to Macau to Japan, and finally settled in

the United States in 1964. Lee's poems, specifically the ones chosen for students, are strongly influenced by his family history and childhood when the family immigrated to the United States. In his poem "For a New Citizen of These United States," Lee reminisces about his life before coming to the U.S. But now, he can't talk about it here in the United States. He explains how his family "stood with the other families on a crowded railroad platform" and how they got separated. He raises the idea of assimilation in the end of the poem and how he is forced to forget, presumably by the American culture. I've included this as a piece of poetry for the students to explore people's reasons for coming to America. It provides a different type of reading to analyze the topic of immigration. Although it is hard to do a readability test with poetry, with my best judgment I got a readability level of 9 using the SMOG method.

**Miller, L., Wolverson, R., Sen, S., Breslau, K., Riccitiello, R., Scelfo, J., et al. (2007, July 30). American Dreamers; Muslim Americans are one of this country's greatest strengths. But they're vulnerable as never before. *Newsweek*, 24.**

This article quotes several Muslim Americans' opinions and combines with them facts and comparisons of Muslims in the United States and Europe. It begins by exploring the government's fear of homegrown terror cells in Muslim communities in Europe as opposed to the United States. It states statistics that a Muslim person is more likely to prosper in the U.S. in comparison with other countries in Europe. After that, it discusses the history of Muslim immigration to America, dating back to the 1960's, the respect for all religion that the United States melting pot has, the use of veils by Muslim women after 9/11, and the changes that have come about for Muslims living in the United States. I decided to use this article to make students aware of current issues with immigration, while bringing up interesting issues to discuss. It also gives a little bit of historical information on immigration and talks a lot about religion as a factor in immigration. Measured with SMOG, this article is at a twelfth grade reading level, slightly higher than the other texts. This will give gifted students an opportunity to be a little bit more challenged with their reading.

**Alexie, Sherman. (1992). *The Business of Fancy Dancing* (13-15). New York: Hanging Loose Press.**

In Sherman Alexie's collection of stories and poems entitled *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, the short story "Traveling" gives the perspective of a Native American and the issues that he has to face because of the immigration of others to America. The narrator and the men in his family are traveling home from a basketball game when they are pulled over by a policeman. The policeman assumes that the driver has been drinking because there is an empty cooler in the backseat (which actually contained sandwiches). He asks the driver a bunch of biased questions like "Who holds the major league record for most home runs in a single season?" When he answers the question wrong, the policeman replies, "You must be drunk" (14). I've included this short story to add to the theme in both literary and cultural diversity. It is a contemporary piece rather than from the time when people first started coming to America, but it shows students that immigration from the past and present is still affecting Native Americans today. The readability is at seventh grade level with the SMOG method.

**Santiago, Esmeralda. (1993). *When I was Puerto Rican*. New York: Addison Wesley Publishing Company.**

Esmeralda's story begins in rural Puerto Rico with her family, including seven siblings. They lead a chaotic life in sometimes primitive conditions. She lives with her unmarried parents who are continually fighting with each other, which finally leads to a permanent break between the two. The breakup steers Esmeralda's mother to move her children and settle in New York City. At the time Esmeralda is only 13, but the book brings the reader through her transition from Puerto Rico, where she is a native speaker, to Brooklyn, where she is in an English-speaking environment. The author takes the reader on her journey through Brooklyn's public school system to a prestigious high school of performing arts. From there she graduates and goes on to attend Harvard University on a scholarship.

I've included this as a longer piece for students to read, so that they can get a bigger picture of immigrants in America. The students will read the entire non-fiction piece to understand a real-life situation of an immigrant to the United States. Although an interesting story to read, the students can also gain valuable insight to immigration from her opinions and experience. The book also includes very lyrical prose and vivid descriptions to give the students a genuine picture of her experience. The readability is at a level 7, which is slightly lower than my target age group. Since the whole class will be reading it together, those with higher reading levels can help the others out. It will also lead to a little less time reading, but a little more discussion about the work.