



Center for

EUROPEAN STUDIES

at the University of Florida

Euro Bookclub

Spring 2024

ces.ufl.edu

ces@clas.ufl.edu

EURO BOOK CLUB LESSON PLAN 2024

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

Unit: Immigration and Industrialization
Unit: Community and Civic Participation

Topic: The Immigrant Experience in a Modern Context

Skill: Point of View

Essential Question: To what extent do immigrants and new Americans feel fully welcomed into, and involved in the American democratic system?

Note to Teacher / Practical Directions:

The immigrant experience is rich, diverse, and an inherent part of the American dream. Understanding why people leave their native lands and the journeys they take to come to the United States is as much a lesson in empathy, as an historical one. In this lesson, student participants will undertake to use textual sources to investigate the historical roots and impacts of immigration to the United States, as well as to cultivate an understanding as to its potentially problematic outcomes.

Formative Assessment: daily exit slips may include, but are not limited to, a self-assessment as it relates to the lesson.

Assessment Goal 1: What can I learn from these resource materials? What questions can I ask about these themes?
Assessment Goal 2: Now that I know what questions I can ask, whom can I ask these questions? How would I go about finding a person or source to help me learn about this theme?

Alternatively, Teacher can offer students an Immigration Experience Pre and Post Questionnaire, to replace the Warm-Up and the Exit Ticket.

Summative Assessment: While no summative assessment is truly necessary for the first lessons, collaborative work may be exhibited through a collaborative Padlet or poster, which will reveal student understandings about the themes discussed in the unit.

Alternatively, Teacher may make use of the Additional/Optional Writing Scenario to have students produce a journalistic work where student journalists conduct hypothetical interviews with newly arrived immigrants about their experiences and expectations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy Standards – History/Social Studies:

RH.6-8.1 – Cite evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2 – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

RH.6-8.6 – Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.

RH.6-8.8 – Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Depth Of Knowledge Levels: 2 Skill/Concept; 3 Strategic Thinking; 4 Extended Thinking.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and International Reading Association (IRA) standards:

7. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Social Studies Practices:

A - Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence:

1. Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, form hypotheses as potential answers to these questions, use evidence to answer these questions, and consider and analyze counterhypotheses.
2. Identify, describe, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, photographs, charts and graphs, artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary and secondary sources).

NYS Standards:

NYS SS1: History of the United States and New York: use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

NYS SS2: World History Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

NYS SS3: Geography Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.

NYS SS5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government - use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the U.S. and other nations; the U.S. Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.

NCTE / IRA Standards for the English Language Arts:

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

EngageNY Scope and Sequence:

10.8 Tensions Between Traditional Cultures and Modernization: Tensions exist between traditional cultures and agents of modernization. Reactions for and against modernization depend on perspective and context.

10.9 Globalization and A Changing Global Environment (1990–Present): Technological changes have resulted in a more interconnected world, affecting economic and political relations and in some cases leading to conflict and in others to efforts to cooperate. Globalization and population pressures have led to strains on the environment.

Focus Question: How do the experiences of newly arrived and first-generation immigrants affect the institutions of government, and individuals residing in various communities in the United States, and how can we analyze the outcome of its effects on communities and individual participation in the greater American society?

Time Allotted: 2 class periods. Additional lessons may be devoted to figurative language, former communist-block countries of Eastern Europe, and the history of Albania. Students are presumed to have an introductory understanding of immigration, and know terms such as pull and push factors.

Academic Vocabulary in Context:

- Asylum
- Emigrant
- Immigrant
- Visa
- Border
- Pull factor
- Push factor

Higher Order Thinking Question: What would make a person residing in a community feel a sense of inclusion and civic participation in their local government, and with the national government as a whole? What would make a person feel that their participation is irrelevant, undercounted, or disproportional?

Materials and Resources: students can use a Warm-up graph, student graphic organizer, a video introduction to the topic, as well as resources and websites to help create a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience, and of the ways it has affected both communities and individuals.

Resources:

- “A Short Border Handbook: A Journey Through the Immigrant’s Labyrinth” by Gazmend Kapllani
- Video: Welcome Home? The Harsh Realities of Immigrants’ Experiences in America - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tZbIodWT84>
- Video: Second Heaven: A young immigrant tells his story of coming to the US from Guatemala - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXZ914J6yDU>
- What Every American Should Know About the Immigrant Experience, by Araceli Hernandez, September 14, 2020. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/what-every-american-should-know-about-the-immigrant-experience/>
- Gazmend Kapllani at Wellesley College on "Border Syndrome": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_l8NWNmJeU&t=175s
- Map of Albania and Greece: <https://geology.com/world/albania-satellite-image.shtml>

Lesson Objectives:

Task 1: Recall: Understand the origins and complicated history of the immigration experience.

Task 2: Describe: Explain the process of immigration experience.

Task 3: Collaborate: Students will use textual collaborative work to capture key details.

Task 4: Synthesize: Collaborate to inform each other about uncovered information.

Task 5: Apply: Cultivate an understanding of the immigration experience.

Language Objective:

- Students will repeat precise vocabulary related to the immigration experience.
- Students will verbally describe the main ideas behind the effects of the immigration experience on individuals and communities, and the relevant points of view.
- Students will examine the ways in which the immigration experience has changed over time.
- Students will be encouraged to use causal words (because of, due to, leading to) and descriptive language.

Content Goal: Student participants will undertake to use sources in various media to investigate the historical roots and purposes of the immigration experience, as well as to cultivate an understanding as to its functions,

effects, and potentially problematic outcomes. Students will comprehend that for some members of this nation's communities, the immigration experience may actually create a feeling of social and political disenfranchisement.

Historicity Skills Goal: Apply historical thinking (complexity, causality, continuity and change over time, contingency, context).

Targeted Conceptual Framework: Research Skills for History - Historical research is a process in which students examine topics or questions related to historical studies and/or current issues. By using primary and secondary sources effectively students obtain accurate and relevant information. An understanding of chronological order is applied to the analysis of the interrelatedness of events. They are intended to be taught in conjunction with appropriate World History content.

Connection: Individual teacher entry

- **In past lessons we learned about**
- **We learned that**
- **We also learned that**
- **Today, we will learn about** some historical roots of the current immigration system.
- **This is important to know, because** some people believe the melting pot of immigrants preserves the principles that are essential to our constitutional republic.

Mini-Lesson: How can young historians determine a subject's point of view, in order to evaluate the modern immigrant experience?

Warm Up / Introduction:

Teacher: What do you think would be the hardest part of an immigrant's journey?

Individually and in groups, students will think-pair-share and then be asked to share some of the ideas they listed. This will informally assess what they know about writing and what misconceptions they possess.

Transition: Now that you have begun to think a little bit about this topic, we are going to elaborate on those initial thoughts you had as we explore what it may have been like to be a person who has emigrated.

Objective: An engaging and interactive lecture will be given so that students can learn about the immigration experience, the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, and about literary devices. The lecture will also include visual components so that students who need visual stimuli will be engaged.

Student responsiveness will be gauged as they respond to questions posed throughout lesson to see what connections they are making to their prior knowledge.

Transition: Now that we have discussed the main attributes of descriptive language, you are going to read about the experiences of an Albanian boy who dreams of coming to live in Greece, and what happens to him during and after his voyage.

Objective: The students will read and compare the points of view and central ideas of the selected readings. The directions given will require the students to include details of the chosen readings and to discuss environments and situations faced by migrants.

Student's written work will be graded based on their depth of thought, the inclusion of details and descriptions, and the grammar and spelling.

1. Why might someone choose to leave their native land?
2. What does it mean to be an immigrant?
3. How are the refugee and immigrant experience connected concepts?
4. How has society's perception of immigrants changed over time?

Think-Pair-Share: What are the benefits of a diverse society?

Alternatively, Teacher can offer students an immigration experience **Pre and Post Questionnaire**, to replace the Warm-Up and the Exit Ticket.

Alternatively, **Pause For a Learning Check:** Ask students what kinds of information and events they would expect to find/write in a diary or a journal of an immigrant. How about a travel journal? Wait for responses.

Teacher Introduction / Background: There are millions of immigrant stories that make up the fabric of the United States, and every single one is important in their own way. These are the stories of adversity, privilege, lack of privilege, race, racism, loneliness, acceptance, and everything else in-between. Before they took that final flight into the States, immigrants often have a certain set of expectations for coming into a new country.

In this lesson, we will investigate What did immigrants to industrializing Europe and America expect of life in those "distant magnets" to which they migrated in such large numbers from the mid-nineteenth century through the late 1920's? What were their dreams, illusions, myths, fears, and hopes? How were they received in their new societies, and how did they fare? What did they think about and how did they feel?

Expectations and reality don't always match. For immigrants, moving to a new country comes with many expectations of a new life in a foreign country.

Teacher Model / Lesson Development: Students view a video resource to scaffold informational understanding of topic: A young immigrant tells his story of coming to the US from Guatemala - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXZ914J6yDU>

Teacher Note: "You are going to view a short clip about Bacilio Miguel, 16, immigrated to the U.S. from Guatemala with his family in 2016. In July 2019, his family's application for U.S. residency was rejected and they are currently appealing their case. Miguel enjoys writing and drawing. He hopes to attend college in Oregon, where he and his family currently live."

At 1:00, pause and ask: "What do you think he means when he says he learned about corruption? How do you think so far his family's situation would make them want to live somewhere else?"

Quick-Check / Pause for Understanding: [at 1:40] What do you think the narrator means when they say "Second Heaven"? How do you feel about this?

Work Period: Students then read two texts, and then individually and in groups answer the questions attached:

1. Compare and contrast two readings you are provided about immigration/immigration experience. How were they similar or different?
2. How did two or more resources challenge or change your ideas on immigration?
3. On the Statue of Liberty a plaque reads, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." What is the significance of placing the quote on the statue and how does this quote relate to the immigrants' experiences you've read about?
4. Consider what you have learned about immigration, how can societies do a better job of supporting newcomers and help them develop a sense of belonging?
5. What surprised or confused you about immigration, and what are you still wondering about?

Early Finishers may be provided with an Extended Reading.

Differentiation, Scaffolding, and Workshop Model Seating: Group seating grouping and placement based upon Prosper pretest and post-test skills assessments, behavioral needs, linguistic needs, IEP goals, baseline assessment, and conferencing. An engaging and interactive introduction will be given. Introduction may include visual components to engage students who need visual stimuli. Visual components may include handouts or organizer.

ELL/IEP/FELL/SIFE students may receive Vocabulary in Context or imbedded definitions. Students may receive differentiated reading. ICT/SETTS teacher may instruct selected group. Varying academic levels: individual writing time to allow students to progress at their own ability level. Auditory learners: encourage small-group discussion to create notes for information.

Extension Activity for Early Finishers may include Extended Reading.

What Every American Should Know About the Immigrant Experience, Araceli Hernandez, September 14, 2020, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/what-every-american-should-know-about-the-immigrant-experience/>

Scaffolding	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5
Identified by pretest data, students not proficient in central idea may receive main idea scaffolded support.					
Identified by pretest data, students not proficient in determining the meaning of words /phrases may receive vocabulary in context.					
Unscaffolded	All other students	All other students	All other students	All other students	All other students

Share Out: Open-ended questions:

1. What do you think Gazi expected to find in Greece before he left?
2. What do you think were some of the “push” factors that made him go?
3. What were some of his experiences in Greece? How do they compare to the expectations?

Discussion Question: If you could design a new immigration system, what features would you include to ensure fairness and representation?

Informed Action: What resources could you use to find out if other people across the United States shared this experience?

MAP OF ALBANIA AND GREECE

Directions: Use the following map to understand the protagonists journey from Albania to Greece.



Source: <https://geology.com/world/albania-satellite-image.shtml>

WARM UP:

Directions: Individually and in groups, study the provided map. View the short video clip, and answer the questions below:

1. What do you think he means when he says he learned about corruption?
2. What do you think the narrator means when they say “Second Heaven”? How do you feel about this?

THINK-PAIR-SHARE:

1. Compare and contrast two readings you are provided about immigration/immigration experience. How were they similar or different?

2. How did two or more resources challenge or change your ideas on immigration?

3. On the Statue of Liberty a plaque reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” What is the significance of placing the quote on the statue and how does this quote relate to the immigrants’ experiences you’ve read about?

4. Consider what you have learned about immigration, how can societies do a better job of supporting newcomers and help them develop a sense of belonging?

5. What surprised or confused you about immigration, and what are you still wondering about?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

6. Do you think Gazi, the protagonist, regrets leaving his home for a new land?

7. Brainstorm some ideas, if you could, some ways in which the issue could be fixed:

STUDENT READING #1 – EXPECTATION

Source: “A Short Border Handbook: A Journey Through the Immigrant’s Labyrinth” by Gazmend Kapllani

Introduction: After spending his childhood in Albania, and fantasizing about life across the border, Gazmend Kapllani escapes to Greece—only to get banged up in a detention center. As he and his fellow immigrants try to find jobs, they begin to plan their future lives in Greece, imagining success that is always beyond their grasp.

Directions: Read the excerpt that follows. Pay special attention to what the protagonist’s expectations are before he embarks on his journey.

The Immigrant in the Realm of the Imperative

You have to get a job. Any job. You have to survive. You have to find somewhere to live—doesn’t matter what it’s like as long as it looks vaguely like a home. You have to learn the language, even if you can’t understand a single word of it and you get your “good nights” and your “good evenings” all mixed up. You have to learn to speak more softly, and not shout, because it scares people. You’re not back home in the village now, you know. You have to keep out of the way of those Black Marias because you turned up in this country without an invitation, making quite an entrance with that woebegone expression of yours and that primitive haircut. People round here haven’t seen anything like that for decades, especially not combined with those clothes, so obviously charity clothes—or maybe you stole them? You have to learn how to walk properly because you’ve got used to walking too fast, like you’ve got the Devil on your back. You’ve got to learn the Highway Code, the sections that apply to pedestrians of course, and you’ve got to stop looking at all those gorgeous local girls like that, the way Quasimodo looks at Esmeralda in Notre Dame de Paris. You have to, have to, have to...without end or expiry date. Day after day, night after night, week after week, month after month, year after year. Not for you the privilege of wanting—you are condemned to live by the mercilessly cruel claims of “have to.” Because you have to make it. Above all, make it.

This is the immigrant’s oath.

Just as doctors are supposed to live by the Hippocratic oath, an immigrant lives by “I have to succeed.” This oath is his only real country from now on. He has to make it, not simply because people back home expect something from him; that’s the least of it. He has to make it because he cannot go back a failure. The thought of failure makes him tremble like a child afraid of the dark. He has to make it, but how? And this is where the common path of immigrants diverges and they split off into successes and failures, the accepted and the rejected, the lucky and the unlucky. Because immigrants, whatever their superficial similarities, differ from each other in exactly the way that everybody in this world differs from everybody else.

...

A large country—Russia, for example—isolated with hermetically sealed borders is like one endless prison, but tiny Albania, also isolated with hermetically sealed borders, is more like a regular straitjacket.

When I was in high school, my friends and I (or at least the few people I dared reveal my thoughts to) used to say that if you wanted to see the borders of the motherland, all you had to do was climb up onto the roof of a block of flats.

I remember our school trip to Sarandë, where at night you can see the lights from the world-beyond-the-borders. They might have been the lights from a village, maybe a town, who knows? We stood there, gawking at them, imagining, speculating, in secret: “What are people like on the other side?” We each had our own ideas on the subject, usually the product of rumors, or pictures we’d seen on television, transformed into mythical stories, which we’d use to feed our fantasies as much as we could. We talked about beautiful beaches, swimming pools, color TVs, but most of all about gorgeous girls, hampered neither by excess pounds nor sexual restraint.

“Girls there are liberated; they don’t expect you to come on to them, they do all the work,” one of my friends reliably informed us. “They’re free out there, how can I put it? You’re constantly ambushed by sex!” he continued, placing unbearable pressure on our adolescent fantasies.

At that moment, one of the girls in our class, a brilliant but hopelessly naïve student, asked our instructor in Marxist-Leninism to explain why capitalist cities were so well-illuminated when the proletariat living there was supposedly dying of starvation in dark slums. The teacher looked down at her over the top of his spectacles, and let his eyes roam across the entire class. As soon as he’d reassured himself that the question was motivated by nothing more than innocent curiosity, he answered with his customary ease, the style he used when he explained that in the capitalist West, the proletariat works a twenty-hour day, sustained only by a diet of boiled greens. “It looks to me as if some of you have been up till all hours staring at Greek monarcho-fascist lighting instead of getting a good night’s sleep to wake refreshed to face the class enemy. Well, let me tell you, the lights you saw come from the villas of the rich. They live in enormous houses while the workers starve, the workers have nothing. They live in darkness, unlike the happy proletariat in our country. Read over the notes you take from my talks, and you’ll sleep better at night, untroubled by reactionary doubts. Understood?” Of course we “understood.” I have the impression that even that naïve straight-A girl got it, because she suddenly went pale, sat down and didn’t say another word.

STUDENT READING #2 – REALITY

Source: “A Short Border Handbook: A Journey Through the Immigrant’s Labyrinth” by Gazmend Kapllani

Directions: Read the excerpt that follows. Pay special attention to what the protagonist’s actual experiences, his “reality”, during and after he embarks on his journey.

You Weren’t Invited

Illegal immigrant. That’s your nickname. That’s your name. That’s your label. After all, you turned up here without an invitation. That’s how people used to migrate in the days before World War I, uninvited, without visas. But that was a very long time ago and things are different now. And if you think that by reminding the locals of that time, they’ll start feeling sorry for you and accept you, you’re living in cloud cuckoo land. You won’t just be an illegal immigrant if you go around doing that, you’ll be an impudent illegal immigrant.

The fact that you arrived uninvited makes you feel uncomfortable, and deeply guilty, and you may never get over that feeling. Because apart from everything else, they keep reminding you of the fact. This is your original sin. Each time you try to stand up for yourself, you’ll hear it: nobody asked you to come. Each time you try to break out of this obscurity, they’ll be there to remind you that you’re an unwanted guest.

You tell them that you want to be legalized, that it’s unbearable trembling every time you see a Black Maria and, anyway, who wants to feel like a scared mouse all the time because he hasn’t got the right papers in his pocket? I may have arrived without an invitation but I work just like the rest of you do, I pay the same taxes as the rest of you do, and most importantly, my boss, or rather, my bosses, need me. Yes, I do realize that you are feeding me, but let me tell you that I more than repay it. Yes, I am dependent on you for my survival, but you depend on me for your wealth. That’s life. Give and take. I have started to build a new life here, I have got used to this city, and who knows, this city might eventually get used to me. So why am I illegal and worse than a stray dog? The city is deaf to your defense. The city is deaf. And on the news, the journalists give voice to the vox pop and want to make sure that you never manage to shake off your nickname, your name, your label: illegal immigrant, illegal life, illegal.

.....

Work, Work, Work

Being an immigrant can mean a lot of things, but most of all it means work. You don’t emigrate so you can play the tough guy, but to save up money. You will do anything to succeed in this: you take on two, maybe three jobs a day, without insurance, of course, undercutting the going rate for the locals; you become a strike breaker, and if need be, you try selling sob stories to your employers to get their sympathy until you realize that sympathy is in short supply; you turn up in Omonia Square at dawn on the off-chance that there’s some work available, and you stand there waiting like some filthy municipal statue nobody can be bothered to clean; you live in a cave, with another ten, fifteen, maybe twenty people, blurring the distinction between home and pigsty; you eat bread and salt, or just bread; you always doze off on the bus from exhaustion and lack of sleep; your stale sweat can be smelled a mile off, because you don’t have time to wash and you need to economize on electricity. You make even the most tight-fisted look generous. You count out your money with the same precision as the anemic monitors drops of blood during a transfusion. You spend nothing, you buy nothing, you live on only the absolute necessities—only counting money satisfies you, that and the thought of more work, even more work. Suddenly, without warning, your strength starts to fail you, arthritis strikes, you get suspect pains in your kidneys, your back, and your heart. You’ll be lucky if you make it into the operating theater. Many don’t. They die on the job; some wall or other collapses on top of them, because their bosses don’t want the expense of making the site safe. Because everyone knows that immigrants die silently, like flies.

STUDENT READING #3

EXTENDED READING FOR EARLY FINISHERS:

What Every American Should Know About the Immigrant Experience

by Araceli Hernandez, September 14, 2020.

Source: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/what-every-american-should-know-about-the-immigrant-experience/>

What should every American know? This question has long been debated, discussed, and deliberated. And while answers need to come from all of us—not just a powerful few—young people have often been excluded from these conversations. A partnership between Chicago Public Schools and the Aspen Institute’s program on Citizenship and American Identity aims to change that. Together they seek to elevate youth perspectives, beliefs, and values as vital to our national conversation of civic purpose.

The following blog is part of our series featuring perspectives from Chicago young people, interrogating and exploring key terms identified by Chicago Public School Participate Civics students. Araceli Hernandez is a 10th-grade student at Marie Sklodowska Curie Metropolitan High School located in the Archer Heights neighborhood of Chicago.

Constantly being told repulsive comments, not being paid the same as others, having to work twice as hard for the same job—these are things some Mexican immigrants have to live with on a daily basis. As a daughter of immigrant parents, I have seen and heard the many negative assumptions people make about immigrants and have felt disappointment and anger. Both my parents are from a beautiful ranch in Mexico called “El Colorado.” In 1999, they decided to come to the United States because they sought better opportunities and a better life not only for them but for their children.

My parents are food vendors and I accompany them to work in the summer and during school breaks. Sometimes there are people who simply want to slam us with rude slurs. I have heard them say things like “go back to your country” or “you don’t belong here” or “all you do is add to the trash.” Hearing those words makes my heart ache and angers me because my parents work hard—day and night—to give me a better life than they ever had. I see them wake up every day at six in the morning and come back home at around nine at night. They don’t deserve this ugly treatment simply because they weren’t born in the US. My mom and I continue on with our work, smile at these people, and say, “I hope you have a great day.” I find it pointless to exchange insults with ignorance. Immigrants are not “aliens” just because they are from a different country.

We have allowed the government to make decisions that harm immigrants, and it will continue to do so if we don’t change our mindsets.

In the past and even today, immigrants have been labeled by those who seek to dehumanize or other them. One such name was “the know-nothings.” The Know-Nothings were an anti-immigration political party in the 1850s. They chose to name themselves “The Know-Nothings” because they claimed that when they asked immigrants questions, they would reply that they knew nothing. This name is harmful to the image of Mexican immigrants because, at first glance, it suggests that immigrants are brainless.

Similarly, a case called Plyler v. Doe (1982) aimed to create more challenges for immigrants by allowing states to deny public education to students based on their immigration status. Those same types of ignorant people who refer to immigrants as brainless also try to deny us knowledge. These roadblocks continue to be unfair and limit

opportunities for those seeking acceptance and fair treatment. But thanks to the ruling on that case, public education can no longer be denied to any person based on their immigration status. Little by little, we can fight for immigrant rights, and show the world that immigrants just want to be treated like humans.

Throughout history, we see groups forming against immigrants who seek better chances, in the name of a false sense of American identity or patriotism. Immigrants are not “job stealers” or stealers of your education. Why not think of them as ambitious people who are simply asking for basic human rights—not people you need to be protected from? As time moves forward, we must change our mindset about how our democracy works—and who that includes—in order to give every person an equal chance at life. My parents didn’t immigrate here for more roadblocks, they came for the security. And by security, I don’t mean the Secure Fence Act of 2006, a Congress-approved 1.2-billion-dollar fence between the Mexico and US border.

Let us create a country where there is less hate. One where we are able to bring people together and be more considerate of everyone’s circumstances. Immigrants are not here to steal jobs, education, or add to this country’s problems. They come here starting from scratch in search of job security or education that will help get them on their feet. Native-born Americans should know more about the full story of our immigrant experience. Know that we are not different because of where we come from, but rather, we all seek a better life and equal opportunities that lead to happiness and peace. If we could all come to realize that, maybe this country would be a lot stronger as we all work on improving it together.