



## **The Study of Immigration to America Past and Present**

by Kathy Hoekenga – The Trinity School

### **Background**

In teaching 5th grade I try to integrate my social studies curriculum, which concentrates on US History, with my language arts program. I have found that the students find history more meaningful and are able to develop deeper understanding of important perspectives and ideas when reading stories about people, real or fictional, living in the time periods they are studying. I therefore use historical fiction novels for literature, and Joy Hakim's series, *A History of US* as a US History text. She writes in a narrative style using many stories that capture the students' interest and imagination as well as raising intriguing questions that don't have simple answers.

For this project I decided to focus on a long unit involving the study of immigration to America. I had taught several parts of this unit in the past, but wanted to see if I could develop and broaden my lesson plans to enable the students to have a deeper understanding of connections between the experiences of immigrants in America's past with immigrants coming to America today. I hoped that they would gain not only an understanding of the reasons different groups of people have come to America and their experiences as new Americans, but an appreciation for the richness of our American culture because of the diversity of peoples that make up America. As it turned out, the students and I learned those things and much more! I ended up changing my plans for student research and technology-based projects mid year because of the questions and interests of the students based on this Immigration unit. It has been a very exciting year, so now I will back-track and explain the steps we took...

### ***Throughlines (for Social Studies and Language Arts)***

1. What does it mean to be an American? How can we find out answers to this question?
2. How can what we learn from history or literature be applied to our lives and the decisions or choices we need to make now and in the future?

Reflection and Comments: I had already identified common themes in history and literature that I could use to generate questions to help me plan units, write discussion or essay questions, and guide the students to an understanding of the historical dynamics of decision-making by groups of people and the formation of American government and culture. This year I identified these themes clearly for the students the first week of school and challenged them constantly to apply them to what we were studying, and to connect their new learning to what they already understood regarding these themes. It really helped the students to have a structure for thinking about what they were learning and generate their own questions. These themes and related questions are:

1. Power- Who has it? Why? How are they using it?
2. Cause and Effect- What are causes of events? What are effects of actions or decisions?
3. Perspective- What are the different viewpoints that groups of people had or may have had about the same events or issues? How did their perspectives affect their decisions?

4. Social Justice Issues -What are injustices or inequities in our society involving different groups of people? What has been done to address them?
5. Ironies and mysteries, or unanswered questions- What are questions raised that may have difficult or confusing or maybe no answers?

### ***Generative Topic: Immigration to America***

Reflection and Comments: I originally chose this topic because my students come to fifth grade after studying their family histories and cultures in earlier grades, so often have an interest in their own heritage, which always involves immigration. Our school also has an emphasis on learning about and respecting diverse cultures, again motivating my students to have an interest in other cultures. We started this unit on Immigration to America shortly before the tragedy of September 11, so the students were suddenly even more interested in learning about immigrants and cultural similarities and differences. One of their first questions that day was, "Why would anyone hate us so much to want to kill themselves and so many other people?" So, developing an understanding of others' perspectives took on a new importance as I planned and went ahead with this unit.

### ***Unit-Long Understanding Goals***

The Understanding Goals that I asked my students to focus on for the whole unit were:

1. Why have immigrants come to America? What difficult choices or decisions did they have to make in leaving their homeland?
2. What affect on America have immigrants had or are they having now? What are some of their cultural contributions?
3. Have immigrants been treated fairly in America? Have there been any civil rights issues? Are there any today? What can you do about them?
4. What do immigrants think it means to be an American?

### ***Understanding Performances:***

This Immigration Unit ended up involving many assignments and activities. As I kept building onto the student's knowledge and discoveries, I altered and changed my yearly plans (hopefully for the better) as new interests were developed. Following is a summary of the assignments and activities that related to this unit:

### ***Introductory Activities (to help create personal interest in Immigration)***

1. Creative Writing Project: My students interviewed family members for story ideas from their family histories. Many of the stories involved the immigration of their ancestors. They then wrote their own historical fiction story based on a family story and did some research to help make their story authentic and accurate factually. This writing project was also connected to the reading of their first class novel, which was historical fiction.

Assessment: The students told their stories orally to a group of classmates and got their feedback, and then shared their rough drafts with them and myself for editing advice and clarification questions if needed. Final Assessment was their final story which was shared with the class.

2. Book Reports: The student's first book reports were on books about people from other cultures. They chose from a variety of books presented in our library. Our big questions were, "Why is it important to learn about people who are different from ourselves? What can we learn about ourselves by learning about them?"

Assessment: Book reports comparing and contrasting a character's life in their book with their own life (venn diagram and written). We then had a class discussion involving what they had learned about themselves by learning about someone from a different culture.

Reflection and Comments: The students had many insightful comments ranging from factual and practical comparisons involving differences in daily life, especially involving technology, and noticing the similarities in their human needs and the importance of personal and family relationships. The class was simultaneously involved in organizing a school wide community service project to help street kids in Kiev, so were also learning a lot about those children and the Ukrainian culture. Overall, they began to realize that they were indeed blessed with many things personally and culturally that they perhaps took for granted. Many important connections!

### ***Guided Inquiry Focus on the question: What is an American?***

1. Immigrant Interviews: I organized a group of recent immigrants from our school community to come to school where each one was interviewed by a pair of my students. To prepare, the class brainstormed many questions that would help them answer our big questions, and these questions were given to our guests ahead of time. We had immigrants from El Salvador, Brazil, Mexico, Cambodia, Germany, England, Australia, Iran, Thailand, and India.

Assessment: Each pair of students wrote a story about their guest and then shared their rough drafts with them to check for accuracy and often ask more questions to make revisions. Their final stories were proudly presented orally to the class and all the immigrants, many who brought food and things from their culture to share with everyone.

Reflection and Comments: The students worked especially hard on their writing since they wanted their guest to be pleased with their story. The final presentation event was eagerly anticipated and an unplanned benefit was the discussion among our guests who learned much about each other, deepening their own understanding and making new friends and connections. They have remained important friends of our class for the year because of this project!

2. Planned Culminating Activity: The students then individually interviewed immigrants from the community, usually friends of their family, and sometimes employees such as the housekeeper or gardener. They followed the same process that we had done at school, including sharing rough drafts with their person and making needed revisions.

Assessment: The final stories were shared with the class and then given to the person interviewed. We had a class discussion to look for common themes in all the immigrant stories and attempted to answer our original questions.

Reflection and Comments: I was pleased with some new insights by the students this year. For instance, they discovered that they often had assumptions about people from specific cultures that turned out to be incorrect, so maybe should be careful about assuming things in the future. Hopefully this will help limit stereotyping or the development of prejudices! They concluded that people from other countries could be either poorer than expected or more educated and well-off than expected, often leading lives similar to their own or with benefits that they were envious of.

The students became excited as they made connections between what they had learned from recent immigrants and what they were learning from our ongoing weekly study of Joy Hakim's series A History of US.

The main reasons given by recent immigrants for coming to America were better opportunities, civil rights, and freedoms than they often had in their countries. Student insights and discoveries included :

1. People are coming to America today for many of the same reasons the first colonists came.
2. The rebels fought for these rights and freedoms in the Revolutionary War.
3. The framers of our Constitution worked to include these rights and freedoms and had great difficulty agreeing on what was important to put in the Constitution, often not agreeing on what some things meant, such as "equal rights".
4. People have had to fight for equal rights for many different groups of people (including immigrant, racial, and religious groups and women) and our country has changed as Amendments have been added or new laws passed. Immigrants come today often because of some of these changes.
5. Immigrants often shared that they think Americans take their opportunities, rights, and freedoms for granted, leading to the students wanting to understand more about them and how our country got them.

So, we actually went into the study of our Constitution (usually a somewhat dry subject) with the students really interested in finding out how it was that we became the first country to develop a government with all the freedoms and rights that their immigrant friends were so excited about!

It was at this point that I decided change my planned research-technology project to accommodate my students' new interests and questions. The students wanted to learn more about civil rights and freedoms and how America attained them. Up till this point they thought "civil rights" always referred to African American rights and the Civil Rights Movement, but now knew that many different people had not had equal rights. Following is therefore another culminating activity!

4. Final Culminating Activity: I decided to challenge the students to do research and write skits to teach others about what they learned about the American rights that were so valued by our immigrant friends, and now by them as well. We had just received a new digital video camera and software to film and edit movies, so I decided (impulsively at the time) that we could be pioneers and film the skits. After brainstorming the topics they were most interested in learning more about, we focused on the following: Freedoms of speech, religion, and the press; Legal rights; Voting rights; Women's and children's rights; Worker's rights; Education rights; and Civil rights for Native and African Americans. The students each wrote, directed, acted in, and edited their own movie, along with acting and filming by their classmates. It was quite a challenging project to organize and keep up with for me, but I had help from a technology-savvy aide and our technology specialist, and as usual the fifth graders caught on faster than I did! When we were finished the students proudly presented their films to the school community! They were a part of a student-written stage production of an "American Town Meeting", an already planned performance that was greatly enhanced by the films.

Final Reflection and Comments :In conclusion, I observed more learning as exhibited by the students' questions, insights, and general enthusiasm and motivation for learning and developing their projects this year than I ever have in the past! This was the first time I set up a project solely based on questions the students chose, challenging them to decide how to present the answers. In the past I had had students write their own scripts for videos, but they had been to present information from research, scenes from literature, or historical events. In spite of all the different ideas the students had for their movies, everything tied together because of the common theme of American civil rights.

It was valuable to have the original questions for the year and for each unit written on the bulletin board and referred to in assignments and discussions to keep the students focused. I also included the questions in letters to parents so that they could be involved in meaningful discussions at home as well. The final project was especially exhausting, but worth it because I think it was the greatest learning experience I have seen in my fifth grade and led to real understanding!

## Video Plan:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Video Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

5th Graders in your skit: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Setting(s) –Please be specific and list in order if there are more than one.

\_\_\_\_\_

Costumes and Props:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Any Needs from Classmates? \_\_\_\_\_

Questions or Concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Videographers: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Video Schedule: Tuesday Mar. 12**

(Blair's groups get dressed and set up during recess;  
Janna's and Ben's groups get dressed and set up from 10:45-11:00;  
Patrick's group be ready to go by 11:40;  
Maria, Corinne, and Kiley's groups get into costume and collect props at 12:30 so ready to go when lunch ends)

All can work on English packet, HW, or read QUIETLY if dressed and waiting. )

### **It absolutely needs to be "quiet on the set" at all times!!**

10:45-11:00 (Great Hall) Blair (Ryan H. and Teresa)

11:00- 11:15 (Great Hall)

11:15- 11:30 (Great Hall )

11:30-11:45 (Shed and Courtyard) Finish Ben? (Teresa, Lauren, Maria, Kelly)- Only if by miracle we are on time!!

11:45-12:10 (Park) Patrick (Lauren, Catherine, Chris, Jodey, Ryan H. and whole class in colonial clothes)

12:45 Leave for Park

12:55 Maria (Janna, Kelly, Kiley)

1:00 Rest of class has PE

1:20 Corinne (Kashi, Teresa, Kashi, Janna)

1:30 Spanish for rest of class

1: 40 Kiley (Amy)

1:55 Class returns for Science (Kiley's group stays for a few minutes if needed to finish scene)

## 5th Grade American Town Meeting Production- March 2002

1. Music- March in to *Yankee Doodle* and sit in Tavern setting (around 4-5 desks covered in table-cloths with appropriate props)

Narrator 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Explain history of Yankee Doodle.

Narr. 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Introduce setting (Tavern in Maryland 3 weeks after Lexington and Concord- Many opinions and questions about what colonies should do)

2. Music- Sing *Sons of Liberty*

3. **Debate 1** (Sons of Liberty and reasons against war)- *Kelly, Lauren (T) vs. Kiley, Janna, Amy (R)*

4. **Patrick** (Intro. To video- Tie in to Sons of Liberty)  
**Lauren** (Intro to video- Tie in to Patrick's intro.)

**Video- Freedom of Speech- Patrick and Lauren (ibook #2 and #1)**  
*Patrick and Lauren-* Concluding sentences. Intro. Kiley and Amy)

5. *Kiley* (Intro. To Video- Tie in to people in 1700's valuing freedom of religion.)  
*Amy* (Intro. Video- tie in to Kiley's)

**Video- Civil Rights regarding freedom of Religion- Kiley & Amy (ibook #19 & #10)**  
*Kiley and Amy* (Concluding sentences. Intro next "debate")

6. **Debate 2** (Lexington and Concord) (*Ryan H., Jodey (T) vs. Ben , Teresa (R)*)

7. *Janna* (Intro.- Tie in to rights people fighting for for future of their families)  
*Kelly* (Intro video- tie in to Janna's)

**Video- Children's Rights (Labor Laws ) - Janna, Kelly,(ibook # 12, 16 & 17)**  
*Janna and Kelly* - (Concluding sentences. Intro Maria)

8. *Maria* (Intro to video- tie in to Children's rights)

**Video- Education Rights Maria**  
*Maria* (Concluding sentences. Intro next "debate")

9. **Debate 3 (Boston Massacre)** (*Maria, Corinne (T) vs. Ryan J., Kashi (R)*)

10. *Teresa* (Intro Video tying in to Boston Massacre trial)

*Ben* (Intro to video tying in to Teresa's)

**Video- Legal Rights- Teresa and Ben (ibooks #6 and #15)**

Teresa and Ben- (Concluding sentences. *Ben* Intro Grant's video")

**11. Video- Freedom of the Press- Grant (ibook #18)**

*Ben* (Concluding sentences. Intro next "debate")

**12. Debate 4 (Boston Tea Party) *Patrick, Chris (T) vs. Blair, Catherine (R.)***

**13. Ryan H.** (Intro video, tie in to colonists wanting right to vote and have representation)

*Blair* (Intro video, tie in to Ryan's)

**Video- Voting Rights-(15th Amendment)- Blair and Ryan H. (ibooks # 4 and #11 )**

*Ryan H. and Blair-* (Concluding sentences. Intro Chris and Catherine)

**14. Chris** (Intro video, tie in to voting rights)

*Catherine* (Intro video, tie in to Chris's)

**Video- Women's Rights (19th Amendment)- Chris and Catherine (ibook #5 and #7)**

*Chris and Catherine* (Concluding sentences. Intro next "debate")

**15. Debate 5** (Sons of Liberty and reasons against war- Conclusion) *Kelly, Lauren (T) vs. Kiley, Janna, Amy (R)*

**16. Corinne** (Intro. Video. Tie in talking about rights that not everybody got right away.)

*Kashi-*( Intro video, tie in to Corinne's)

**Video- Native American Rights- Kashi and Corinne (ibook # 13 and #9)**

*Corinne and Kashi* - (Concluding sentences. Intro Ryan J. and Jodey)

**17. Ryan J.** (Intro video and tie in to Corinne and Kashi's)

*Jodey* (Intro video and tie in to Ryan J.)

**Video- Abolition of Slavery (13th Amendment)- Ryan J. and Jodey (ibooks #8 & #3)**

*Ryan J. and Jodey* (Concluding sentences. Intro next Narrator)

18. Narrator 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (Explain history of next song)

Music (*The World Turned Upside Down*)

19. Narrator 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (Concluding ideas to tie everything together-

20. Narrator 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (Thank everyone for coming! THE END!)

This paper is a result of research conducted by the author. Any use of this material in any theme, essay, term paper, research paper, thesis, or dissertation should be credited to the author. This research was conducted with the support of the Bay Area Teacher Development Collaborative.