

# Our Family Stories: What Can We Learn From Them?

## Summary

In this lesson students will learn about immigration and the diversity of families that have made new homes in the United States and Utah. Students will also explore their own family histories, as well as the experiences of other Utah residents. Students will also gain hands on experience by conducting oral histories of immigrants (either in their family or of a person they know).

## Time Frame

10 class periods of 30 minutes each

## Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Character, Social & Civic Responsibility

## Materials

### Lesson One

Photographs of immigrants/immigrant families (use pictures from [Missing Stories](#), students pictures, teacher pictures, school employees, and/or friends).

Chart paper

Fine-tipped markers

### Lesson Two

- [Watch the Stars Come Out](#)

### Lesson Three

- [How Many Days until America?](#)

### Lesson Four

- [Missing Stories](#)

### Lesson Five

- [Molly's Pilgrim](#)

Colored paper

arts and crafts supplies

glue or tape

plastic water bottles or clothes pins or toilet paper rolls or yogurt containers

### Lesson Six

- [Family History Questionnaire](#)

### Lesson Seven

World map

Straight pins

Self-stick labels

- [Family History Questionnaire](#)

## Background for Teachers

Teachers should be familiar with issues related to immigration in the United States and Utah in particular. Teachers should be aware of the diversity of immigrants in the Utah community. Reading "Missing Stories" will help with this information. Teachers should know how to conduct an interview and create interview questions (tips and tactics for conducting interviews can be found under "attachments". These guidelines will be helpful for teachers and they can translate these instructions to their students. Other resources for students are provided in this lesson plan.

## Student Prior Knowledge

none needed.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will learn about immigration and the experiences of immigrants.

Students will learn about their own family history and the path their ancestors took to the United States and Utah.

Students will become more sensitive to the difficulties associated with relocating and being an ethnic minority in a community.

Students will learn about the many different ethnic communities that call Utah home.

Students will learn how to create interview questions and conduct an interview (oral history).

## Instructional Procedures

### Lesson One

Tell the students you are going to show them a series of pictures that show different people/families who moved to the United States from other countries.

While they are looking at the pictures (websites attached), they should be thinking about the following questions. Show the pictures one at a time so that the students have time to think about each question in relation to the individual pictures.

Where did the people in the photographs come from?

Why did the people in the pictures decide to move to the United States?

What was it like for the people in the pictures when they first arrived in the United States?

Was it easy or difficult, why?

How have the lives of the people in the pictures changed since they moved to the United States?

Record the students' responses on a chart and discuss any patterns or contrasts they may see.

Revisit this chart and continue to fill in students answers as the class continues to gain insight through stories, interviews, and discussions.

Other images can easily be found on the Internet. The websites attached to this lesson plan have additional resources (images and information).

### Lesson Two

Begin by asking the class to think about any stories they have been told by a grandparent, older friend or relative about a personal experience from their childhood (younger years). Ask the class, the following questions:

What makes such a story special?

Is it because the stories are true?

Is it because you know some of the people involved?

Is it because of what the story is about?

Show students the cover of the book, Watch the Stars Come Out

Ask the class to predict the following,

What is the book about?

What do the stars have to do with the story?

What do they think the children on the cover are carrying in their packages?

Introduce the book by telling the students that it is about a grandmother who tells her granddaughter a story that her mother used to tell her--the story of her coming to America.

Begin to read the story to the class. As you read the story encourage the children to study the illustrations for additional information. After you have finished the story, revisit the student predictions of the story before it began. Have the students talk about,

What surprised them in the story.

What events or ideas made an impact on them?

How the story was similar or different from the stories they have been told by people in their life (grandparents, parents, older friends or relatives).

### Lesson Three

Show the class the cover of the book, How Many Days to America?

Ask the students about the similarities and differences between the two covers and then ask them to predict what they think the story will be about.

Tell the class that this story is about the present day (and not a past experience as was When the Stars Come Out. This story address the recent immigration of Caribbean people. Because many frightening events happen to the family in the story, make sure to spend time discussing the various problems the families encounter during immigration (difficult travel conditions, thirst and hunger, death, discrimination, etc.).

After reading the story to the class, ask the following questions:

Imagine what it would be like if their family had to make such a journey

How would they feel if they had to leave all of their things behind?

What would they bring with them if they could only fill one backpack?

What do they think the most difficult part of the journey was and why?

Do the students think it was appropriate to end the story with a Thanksgiving celebration? Why or why not?

Make sure to have a thorough discussion of this story and the follow up questions. It is important for the students to express their thoughts and feelings about this story and for them to understand the extent to which many families must go in order to be safe and have opportunity.

### Lesson Four

(This lesson can be repeated over several short lesson periods to ensure the student's attention and enthusiasm. It might take two days to get through this lesson).

Read selected story excerpts from Missing Stories by Leslie Kelen and Eileen Hallet Stone. After reading each excerpt, ask the class the following questions. Their responses can be added to the chart that was started during the Lesson One.

Where did the person in the story (or their family) come from?

Why did the person in the story (or their family) decide to move to the United States?

What was it like for them when they first arrived to the United States (or Utah)?

Was it easy or difficult, why?

How have the lives of the people in the story changed since they moved to Utah?

### Lesson Five

Read Molly's Pilgrim by Eve Bunting, to the class. Discuss with the students how this depiction of Thanksgiving is different than others they have read, seen, or experienced. How are the experiences Molly has (as a new immigrant and new at school) similar or different from experiences they have had.

Have the students each make a pilgrim doll representing some part of their heritage (ethnic, racial, religious, etc), based upon what they know about their family. Provide students with water bottles, yogurt containers or clothes pins as the base of their dolls. Have scissors, glue, markers, colored paper, etc., also available (or these can be made on paper if containers are not available).

Have the students bring their pilgrims home and show them to their parents, guardians, or grandparents and have the children begin to ask questions about their background (using the pilgrim as a way to begin the conversation). Tell each child they will be asked to share one new thing they learned about their family during the next class period (they might want to take some notes during their conversation).

### Lesson Six

To help find out where the student's ancestors were born, have the students write a letter to their

parents. In this letter the students should tell their parents what they are studying (immigration) and that they would like their parent(s)/guardian to help them complete a [family history](#). Students should be given copies of the questionnaire and told to fill it out as best they can. Students should be given a few days to complete this assignment and should bring their forms back to class when they are complete (on the assignment due date).

### Lesson Seven

This lesson is for the day the students turn in their family history questionnaires. On a world map, have the students identify the locations their family first originated (for most students there will be multiple locations). Each child should write their name and their relatives name (grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, etc) on a sticky note or self stick label. Attach the sticky label to a straight pin and place the pin on the map. (Note: A map of Mexico, which includes the states, maybe beneficial because of the number of family members from the different parts of Mexico). Once all the labels are placed on the map, have the class chart/graph the number of labels on each different country, or different states of Mexico, so they can see how varied their origins are.

### Lesson Eight

Begin by asking the class what an interview is--when one person asks another person questions, in order to obtain information. Tell the class that they will have the chance to interview either a family member or a school employee about some of his/her coming to America stories.

Divide the students into small groups. Instruct the students, in their groups, to write a list of questions they would like to know about the people and families they have been learning about. Have each group come up with two or three questions they could ask. Gather the class together to share their ideas and questions, writing them down on chart paper.

Point out to the class that it is necessary to ask a few short-answer questions:

Where were you born?

How old were you when you came to the United States?

Who else from your family came with you? How did you get here?

What makes an interview most interesting and successful are open-ended questions that will encourage the person being interviewed to share and expand on stories and ideas. For example:

How did you feel when your parents first told you that you were leaving your home?

What did you want to take with you? Why?

What was the most difficult thing about moving to a new country?

What did you like most about moving here?

What family traditions do you celebrate that come from the country in which you were born?

From the list of questions designed by the students, create one "class questionnaire," have one student in the class very neatly write this questionnaire (8-10 questions) and copy this form for each of the students.

Have the students practice interviewing each other before they try their interviews on an adult. If it is possible to have an adult or two (parents or school employees) come to the class and let the children interview them, this will be helpful.

### Lesson Nine

Students can either conduct their interviews at home or in the classroom. They may invite their interview subject to the classroom. If there are students who do not have anyone to interview, they could work with other students in the class. After the interviews have been conducted, students should rewrite their interview notes in their best handwriting.

Make sure to spend some time at the end of this project talking with the students about what they learned. It would be helpful to revisit the chart made during Lesson One and see what the students have learned since.

### Strategies for Diverse Learners

For younger students or students who teachers feel might not be able to conduct an interview, here is an alternative assignment:

Have the student(s)(with the help of their parents) write a story of their or their family's journey to America/Utah. This can model the children's story, Grandfather's Journey (Caldecott Metal Books). Children born in Utah can write their own "Journey" story about a special vacation they had taken, or trips to a relative's house.

Students can share their stories with the class, as well as any "show and tell" items they might have.

### Extensions

If there is time or resources available, a class book can be made of all the interviews. If students have pictures from their interviews, these could also be collected into the book.

Two additional lessons can also be added to this lesson plan. These would especially be beneficial for older/more advanced students.

#### Solving Problems: A New Life in America/Utah

What students will be doing:

- Brainstorming challenges immigrant families face.

- Reading and discussing Angel Child, Dragon Child by Michele Maria Surat.

- Reading and discussing Amelia's Road by Linda Jacobs Altman.

- Participating in a group to create pages for a class handbook, "How to Make Someone Feel at Home in America."

#### Immigrant Lives: Through Artists Eyes

What students will be doing:

- Reading and looking at illustrations in Grandfather's Story by Allen Say.

- Listening to a guest speaker who was an immigrant as a child

- Sharing family paintings, illustrations or photos from an experience of being an immigrant

- Write stories as if they are on their own journey to the US (from an immigrant point of view).

- Illustrate pictures for their "family journey" stories.

### Bibliography

Bunting, E. (1990). How Many Days to America?: A Thanksgiving Story. Clarion Books.

Cohen, B. & Duffy, D.M. (1998). Molly's Pilgrim. HarperCollins.

Kelen, L.G, & Stone, E.H. (2000). Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic Minority Groups in Utah. Utah State University Press. Logan, UT.

Levinson, R. (1995). Watch the Stars Come Out. Puffin Publishing.

### Authors

SUSAN HARDY