



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2026 Volume III: Asian American History and the Making of the U.S. Immigration System

Immigration Narratives: A Literary Journey

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Although headlines about anti-immigrant violence can make one feel powerless, it is important to remember that today's vast immigration apparatus did not always exist. In this unit, seventh grade students examine Asian American history to understand the contentious debates, pivotal choices and conflicting motives underlying the U.S. immigration system.

Armed with historical knowledge, students consider how policies impact lives. Students split into small Literature Circle groups within the class, with each group reading and discussing a different immigrant memoir. The memoirs include *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* by Mary Paik Lee, *Nisei Daughter* by Monica Sone, *Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* by Adeline Yen Mah, *Funny in Farsi: A memoir of growing up Iranian in America* by Firoozeh Dumas, *Here We Are: American Dreams, American Nightmares* by Aarti Namdev Shahani, and *Call Me American* by Abdi Nor Iftin. As a culminating activity, students participate in a Socratic Seminar discussion to reflect on common themes among the narratives.

By learning about the history of the United States immigration system through the lens of Asian immigration, reading immigrant memoirs, and participating in collegial discourse, students gain confidence and compassion to navigate their life's journey.

(Developed for Gifted English/Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for English/Language Arts, grade 8; and English, grade 9)

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