



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

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

Oral Histories and Stories of Immigration

Curriculum Unit 26.03.04, published September 2026

by Wendy Dane

Introduction

Detained in this wooden house for several tens of days,

It is all because of the Mexican exclusion law²⁷ which implicates me.

It's a pity heroes have no way of exercising their prowess,

I can only await the word so that I can snap Zu's whip.²⁸

From now on, I am departing far from this building.

All my fellow villagers are rejoicing with me.

Don't say that everything within is Western styled.

Even if it is built of jade, it has turned into a cage.

-Anonymous (Chinese poem carved into the walls of the Angel Island detention barracks.)¹

How did we come to be in the United States? How did we get here? What relatives made the choice to immigrate to America? Why did they leave their home? What struggles did they face, sacrifices made? Where did my relatives enter the United States, with 314 points of entry? These are a few of the many questions we can ask ourselves about our family's personal stories and living in America today. According to recent American census data, a quarter of the nation's children have at least one foreign-born parent. 84 million Americans are immigrants, or children of immigrants. America appears to have its door wide open, or slightly ajar to immigration, and has so throughout history. But as the above poem written by a Chinese man imprisoned on Angle Island suggest, only if you have the right name, the right skin color, the right networks, the right religion, or the right immigration status.

To understand who gets to build a life in America – and who is kept out – we must look closely at the shadow cast by the Asian Exclusion era (1875-1943). Tracing U.S. immigration and naturalization history from the Naturalization Act of 1790 to modern policy reveals a long lineage of legislative choices and legal battles.

Together, these laws and court decisions systematically engineered demographic landscapes, revealing deep-seated biases in how the United States has historically defined belonging, opportunity, and citizenship.

This unit will contain history, vocabulary, questions, and supporting evidence to inspire the student to successfully engage in study and in their assignment. The climax of the unit will be an historical oral interview of a family member (or another adult) by the student. We can then share answers we found through historical research to the following questions.... *Why am I here and how did I get here?*

Rational

Last year, my 10th grade students represented a range of mixed ethnic backgrounds, mostly Latino, with a few Asian and African American students. A student joined our class from Venezuela, knowing very little English. She was quiet, sitting alone and speaking very little. I could only sympathize with how much she had struggled; leaving her home country, family and friends behind, her travels to America, navigating through a new country, new culture, new school and new language. My Spanish is very limited, so I rely on a Power Point presentation to translate all my lectures into Spanish. It was interesting to see the students ‘snicker,’ only to turn around, to read what’s printed on the screen. Very often Power Point translates incorrectly, resulting in myself laughing, too. Many times, I asked students to translate for me. I praise the students for their expert translation, remarking how valuable it is to speak more than one language and be able to translate. Time passed, and the Venezuelan student became more comfortable, making friends with fellow classmates. The classmates were so wonderful to help her and welcome her into the class. Most of the students were fully able to empathize with her struggles, for most of them have not been in this country long, either.

We can understand the first generation as foreign-born individuals who immigrated to this country with the possibility of naturalization. Like my student from Venezuela, they often face the steepest cultural and linguistic hurdles and may retain a primary cultural identity to their homeland. Second generation are individuals born in the new country who have at least one foreign-born parent. These individuals are often referred to as native-born citizens with foreign parentage. Because they are raised entirely within the host country’s educational systems, the 2nd generation tends to be highly acculturated², speaking the local native language and often acting as a bridge between their immigrant parents and society. Third generation are descended from the 2nd generation with at least one foreign-born grandparent. By this generation, because of their interactions with schools and popular culture, the family is generally completely acculturated, maintaining family traditions and heritage.

Ruben G. Rumbaut³ coined the term “1.5 generation” or “one-and-a-half” in 2012 to describe individuals who were born abroad but immigrated to the new country as children. The “1.5 generation” typically blends the cultures of their homeland and host countries.⁴ Most of my students are the “1.5 generation”. They are foreign-born and placed in the Oklahoma Public School system. Many of the 1.5 generation students are older than their classmates, being assigned to a grade by administration. Often is the case that their language (or lack of proficient English language) will be the determining factor of which grade the student will be placed. My one-and-a-half generation students are generally older than the grades age, being more mature in their actions. I must remember that these students are older and allow flexibility for the age difference.

I teach ELA to 10th graders at East Central High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a school with grades 9 through 12. Our student population is 64% Hispanic, 13% African American, 9% Caucasian, 6% Multi-Race, 5% Asian, 2% American Indian and 2% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. 89% of East Central High School student bodies are a minority. 90% of our student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch assistance, significantly higher than the Oklahoma state average of 61%, suggesting the area maintains a high poverty rate. The teacher to student ratio at East Central High Schools is 22:1, higher than Oklahoma's state average of 16:1, and higher than the U.S. national average of 15:1. The 2026 graduation rate is 67%, with the overall testing rank of 1 out of 10. The 2026 proficiency rank in Reading English Language is 7%, significantly lower than the Oklahoma State Public School average.⁵ Great Schools Rating = 1/10.

My classroom reflects these diverse challenges, with many students unable to speak, read or write in the English language. Some cannot read or write in their native language. It is important to differentiate and scaffold students who require flexibility and assistance. The students' strengths are adaptability; many are adapting to a new school, new culture, and new country. Many are making new friends, navigating their way through unknown systems.

Another layer of difficulty is the reality of many students arriving tardy at school. Many families have one car, or one needs to drop off siblings to daycare, school, or a parent requires the car for work. Some families have no car. The school has addressed this issue by assigning passes to those tardies, monitoring hallways and contacting families. Some students are without a family member, being raised by a non-related adult. A few students are homeless, living in shelters. Some students have not been in a school setting in years. Yet other students will read, speak, and write with proficiency. This diverse population will be the catalyst for this unit.

Student Outcomes

In grade 10, students collaborate with classmates on projects, using their advanced listening and speaking skills. They can summarize and paraphrase complex texts and navigate the five stages of the writing process to produce an informative essay. Students will continue to read various texts for inspiration, deepening their ability to comprehend and analyze complex texts and evaluating how historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect their meaning and style. By grade 10, students can deepen their vocabulary and expand them through reading word study, class discussion, and employ these skills in their essay. Students can formulate questions, evaluate resources, and integrate information from the oral interview, producing an advanced essay for their final project. This approach aligns with research indicating that active learning and source-based questions improve student engagement and historical understanding.

By connecting historical immigration patterns to present-day discussions, the unit will increase relevance, making learning more meaningful to 10th grade students. The curriculum will be structured around essential questions such as how immigration has shaped American identity, how policies have evolved over time, and how immigrant experiences differ across historical and social contexts? Students can engage with primary documents, oral histories, and demographic data, which encourages them to analyze evidence, evaluate multiple perspectives, and construct formal arguments.

These 12 vocabulary words will be an excellent choice for this unit:

- 1) Immigration
- 2) Refugee
- 3) Acculturation
- 4) Indentured
- 5) 1.5 Generation
- 6) Assimilation
- 7) Transnational
- 8) Resilience
- 9) Citizenship
- 10) Culture
- 11) Ethnicity
- 12) Naturalization.

I will have the students write the definitions to the above vocabulary words and practice using each in a complete sentence.

Student achievement will improve as the unit emphasizes higher-order thinking skills and literacy development. Students will practice reading texts, writing evidence-based organizers, and engaging in classroom discussions – all skills that directly support success in standardized tests and future coursework.

This unit will encourage tolerance and respect for others' differences, coupled with knowing one's immigration experience. A curriculum on immigration and migration histories and oral histories allow students to see the larger social forces which have shaped individual and family choices. The lessons will foster students' awareness of our diversity and nurture comparisons and compassion. Particularly in personal and family history activities, learning about immigration provides meaningful connections, skills and strategies for students to see and interact within their connections and the way they view the world.

The unit will foster personal connection, particularly for students from immigrant backgrounds, which can increase motivation and participation. When students see their personal histories reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning.

The students will encounter this curriculum in Unit 4 ELA Study Sync with the essential questions: *"How does who we were guide who we become?"* and *"How does knowing our origin help us in life?"*

Important Dates in U.S. Immigration and Naturalization History

There are many important dates that influenced our country's shaping of immigration, and it is important to understand these laws and acts for they dictated America's immigration patterns.⁶

On March 26, 1790, the U.S. Congress passed the **Naturalization Act of 1790**. This was the first time the federal government established uniform rules for granting citizenship.⁷ It restricted citizenship eligibility exclusively to "free white persons"⁷ of "good moral character"⁸ who had resided in the United States for at least two years. Indentured servants, slaves, and women were not eligible for citizenship. It had four key provisions: 1) Racial Requirements, 2) Residency Requirements, 3) Character Requirements, and 4) Citizenship for Children. Racial Requirements said citizenship was limited to free white males, formally excluding any females or persons of color. Immigrants had to prove good moral character to the satisfaction of a common-law court and take an oath or affirmation to support the U.S. Constitution. The 1790 Naturalization Act granted U.S. citizenship to the children of naturalized citizens, provided they were under 21 years of age and residing in the U.S. Children of a U.S. citizen born abroad were also granted citizenship. The explicit racial restriction on who could naturalize remained intact until it was fully eliminated by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.

Over the decades following the 1790 Naturalization Act, the naturalization laws were continually revised to encourage the immigration of "free white persons."

In **1875**, the **Page Act** sought to ban the immigration of forced laborers, convicted felons, and women who were brought into the country for "immoral purposes"⁹ like prostitution. This act targeted Asian women, subjecting them to invasive, humiliating interrogations and provided the means to exclude.

The infamous **Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882** was the first federal legislation to explicitly suspend immigration for a specific nationality. It banned all Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years and prohibited current Chinese residents from obtaining U.S. citizenship, even though Chinese were already barred from citizenship because of the 'free white persons' requirement in the 1790 Rule of Naturalization. Only diplomats, travelers, merchants, teachers and students were permitted with a complex certification from the Chinese government.

The **1892 Geary Act** renewed the Chinese Exclusion Act with modifications of continued restrictions for Chinese persons. The restrictive measures established in the 1892 Geary Act were extended indefinitely in 1902 and remained in effect until the Chinese Exclusion Acts were formally repealed by the Magnuson Act of 1943.

1907/1908 saw the **Gentleman's Agreement Act**. This was an informal arrangement where Japan agreed to deny passports to Japanese laborers emigrating to the U.S. In exchange, President T. Roosevelt pressured San Francisco, CA to rescind its discriminatory order that segregated Japanese children into separate public schools. While it halted new Japanese laborers from entering the U.S., it allowed the migration of parents, wives and children of current residents. This loophole paved the way for "picture brides,"¹⁰ allowing male immigrant workers who married women on the recommendation of a matchmaker who exchanged photographs between the prospective bride and groom. Angel Island in San Francisco (1910-1940) was the admitting port on the West coast where the picture brides arrived in America after months of hardship.

Americans, fearing the immigrating women traveling solo were of ‘immoral character,’ were screened physically and interrogated at Angel Island, often being detained for weeks or even months. The interrogation questions were absurd¹¹, hoping for incorrect answers from the brides, facilitating deportation.

1910 Japan-Korea Treaty. Through this agreement, the Empire of Japan formally annexed the Korean Empire, placing Korea under Japanese colonial rule until 1945. Korean men and women were treated the same as Japanese immigrants under the Gentlemen’s Agreement Act.

1924 saw the **Johnson-Reed Act** – a highly restrictive U.S. federal law that established national origin quotas, virtually excluding Asian immigrants and authorized the creation of the U.S. border patrol. The quotas heavily favored Western European immigrants while severely limiting those from Southern and Eastern Europe. The act completely prohibited the immigration of all Asian populations as only Asians were barred from naturalization at this time. This act also established the modern system of requiring all prospective immigrants to obtain a visa prior to entering the United States.

The **Magnuson Act of 1943** (or **Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act**). Enacted in the middle of World War II, this act allowed Chinese immigrants to become U.S. citizens; however, it strictly limited immigration to a tiny quota of 105 Chinese immigrants per year.

The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 maintained the quota system that disproportionately favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, while setting small quotas for Asian countries. Driven by Cold War-era concerns, the law empowered governments to bar or deport individuals suspected of having communist sympathies. The term “free white persons” was finally removed, and this was the last of the Asian Exclusion repeals. This act did create the “**Asia Pacific Triangle**.”¹²

The **1965 Immigration and Nationality Act**, also known as the **Hart-Celler Act**, overhauled U.S. immigration by abolishing the discriminatory national quota system established in the 1920’s. The act prioritized family reunification (75%) and employment (20%) and refugees (5%) while imposing the first-ever numerical limits on immigration from Europe. This law is considered a massive civil rights achievement of its era. By removing barriers to non-European immigration, it set powerful demographic forces in motion that significantly altered the cultural and ethnic makeup of the United States. This led to increased immigration from Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the decades to follow.

The **Fall of Saigon in 1975**. This was the capture of the capital Saigon, South Vietnam by the People’s Army of Vietnam and the Viet Cong. This event marked the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of a formal reunification of Vietnam under communist rule. In the days leading up to the city’s capture, the U.S. launched a massive evacuation effort. Over 7,000 Americans and South Vietnamese were air lifted by helicopters to aircraft carriers offshore. In the months following the fall of Saigon, the United States made provisions to admit approximately 135,000 Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians to resettle across the United States with resources to help them establish new lives. Following the communist victory, the city of Saigon was renamed to Ho Chi Minh City, in honor of their former revolutionary leader.

The Refugee Act of 1980 responded to the crisis in American policy concerning refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. It is a landmark law that amended the Immigration and Nationality Act to establish a comprehensive, uniform policy for the admission and resettlement of refugees. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians and Hmong fled political chaos and physical danger in their homelands. This mass exodus of refugees seeking to escape the new communist regime was referred to as ‘boat people.’¹³ Between

1975 and 1979, some 300,000 refugees were able to come to the United States through the Presidential action of Jimmy Carter. There are four key components to The Refugee Act: 1) It adopted the UN's definition of "refugee"¹⁴ 2) It raised the annual refugee ceiling from 17,400 to 50,000 3) It allowed individuals already in the United States to seek asylum and 4) It created programs to help newly arriving refugees.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, signed into a federal law by President Ronald Reagan, Congress addressed the problem of undocumented immigration. It was a multi-pronged system that focused on employer sanctions, legalization programs and border enforcement.

The **Immigration Act of 1990**. Congress revised the Immigration Act of 1965 by implementing the H-1B visa program for skilled temporary workers, with some provisions for conversion to permanent status, and the diversity visa lottery for populations unable to enter through the preference system.

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, signed into law by President Clinton built on the steps of IRCA in 1986. IIRIRA significantly overhauled U.S. immigration law, instituting harsher penalties, stricter border controls and broader criteria for deportation. This law established the foundation for modern U.S. deportation and enforcement operations.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, sharply affected the public's perspective on immigration. A total of 20 foreign-born terrorists were involved who entered the U.S. on tourist or student visas. The attack that killed 2,974 civilians. The U.S. government reacted by expanding the budget, staffing and powers of the immigration enforcement bureaucracy with the **Patriotic Act**,¹⁵ and the **Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002**.¹⁶ The same year the **Homeland Security Act** was passed to consolidate 22 diverse agencies and bureaus to create the **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**.

Map Studies

Study this map: "How the origins of America's immigrants have changed since 1850."¹⁷ This map is by the PEW Research Center and displays the top country of birth among immigrants by state from 1850 to 2022.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/22/how-the-origins-of-americas-immigrants-have-changed-since-1850/>

How to discuss this map with your students: Ask the students what they notice about this map? What changes stand out? What are the differences between the East coast vs. the West coast? Can you observe what ethnic group is most prominent in what time frame? In more recent years, what is the dominant ethnic immigration group? Why? Review how United States immigration laws influenced the changes over time.

Study this next map: "Immigration and Naturalization."¹⁸ source – David Rumsey Map Collection

<https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~344543~90112522:7--Immigration-and-Naturalization>

The work titled "7. Immigration and Naturalization" is a wall map produced by A.J. Nystrom & Co. in 1962, as part of the "Citizenship for Democracy Charts" series. It was created by Stanley Dimond and Miles Beamer,

published as educational material for classroom use. The publisher, A.J. Nystrom & Co., has been known for producing educational maps and globes since its founding in 1903. The visual style is straightforward and functional, typical of mid-20th-century educational materials. It employs bold colors, particularly red, to highlight key data points and illustrations. The subject matter focuses on immigration to the United States, depicting reasons for immigration, origins of immigrants, and the process of naturalization.

- Illustrations and Themes: The top section contains illustrations representing various reasons why people immigrated to the United States, such as religious and political freedom, adventure, free or cheap land, freedom of enterprise, and better pay.
- Graphs and Data: A central bar graph titled "They Came Year After Year," illustrates immigration to the United States by decades, providing a visual representation of immigration trends over time. Another graph, "They Came From Everywhere," breaks down immigration numbers by geographical region, emphasizing the diverse origins of immigrants.
- Naturalization Process: The chart includes a section on the steps in the naturalization of foreign-born individuals, depicted through a series of illustrations and brief descriptions.
- Immigration Totals: The map provides a total figure for immigration to the United States since 1820, totaling over 42 million individuals.
- Naturalization Data: Another graph displays the number of naturalized citizens over specific periods. This chart was produced before 1965 Immigration Act which overhauled the system and jumpstarted immigration.

This work reflects the post-World War II era's focus on immigration and integration. The United States was experiencing significant social changes, including the Civil Right movement, shifts in immigration policy, and growing attention to educational reform. This chart would have been used in classrooms to educate students about the history and process of immigration in the country, fostering an understanding of the diverse roots of American society. This educational tool serves to inform students about the historical patterns of immigration and the legal processes involved in becoming a U.S. citizen. By visualizing complex data in an accessible format, it aids in developing a comprehensive understanding of the United States' demographic changes and the social and economic factors influencing immigration.

How to discuss this map with your students: Do the students notice who is depicted as "the immigrant?" The chart shows reasons for why immigrants came. It shows what years immigrants came in graphs. The interesting part of the chart "They came from everywhere" in graph form, showing the overwhelmingly majority immigrating from Western Europe in bold red color. How does this map help your students to understand Asian exclusion in this map and data? This is a great place to stop and review the biased laws that encouraged Western European migration and discouraged non-Caucasian immigration, especially from Asian nations.

Finally, look at this map with your students: "A Nation of Immigrants"¹⁹ source: David Rumsey Map Collection

The work titled "A Nation of Immigrants," authored by Daniela Passal and John F. Kennedy 1959. Important vintage pictorial map by Daniela Passal, issued as a companion to John F. Kennedy's 'A Nation of Immigrants' pamphlet in 1959. The map attempts to communicate the diversity of America's population through ethnic caricature: in Missouri, a German man in lederhosen²⁰ lifts a stein of beer; in California, a Chinese man with a "Fu Manchu"²¹ does the same with a cup of tea; in New York, a rabbi uses a shofar²² and an Italian man in a tuxedo sings into a microphone. There is an additional series of images intended to reflect the industries of the states: cars in Michigan; cows and beer in Wisconsin; an atom in New Mexico. Strikingly absent from the map is a mention of Africa or Africa slavery. The two figures working cotton fields in the South are both Caucasian, and the area is interspersed with mentions of English and French immigration but ignores the history of African slavery or African American labor migration. One black man is shown playing a trumpet in Alabama. Surrounding the map is a list of ethnicities, Armenians through Portuguese, though again, "Africans" is conspicuously absent. In the lower-left corner is a small explanatory essay: *The United States of America is,*

indeed, a nation of immigrants--a democratic society of more than 170 million individuals composed almost entirely of immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. All told, some forty million immigrants have come to our shores since the beginning of American history... these are some of yesterday's immigrants who have supplied a continuous flow of creative abilities and ideas that have enriched our nation. The immigrants we welcome today and tomorrow will carry on this tradition and help us to retain, reinvigorate and strengthen the American spirit.

How to use this map with your students: Yes, this colorfully illustrated map shows diverse immigration with colorful ethnic characters in each state. It is important to note that the map appears to illustrate that all immigration is the same – Western European or Asian. The map does not address the ways in which race shaped immigration and exclusion. Discuss why slavery, or African decent, is omitted from the map.

Readings

*“The Best We Can Do”*²³ (2018) by Thi Bui is a powerful, beautifully illustrated graphic memoir contextualizes the Vietnam War through the intimate, fractured lens of civilian survival, displacement, and trauma. Bui was born in Saigon three months before South Vietnam fell in 1975, and she fled the country with her family as young “refugees.” This memoir will drive my students’ understanding of immigration and refugee dilemma that is held common to all newcomers. We will trace how Bui’s migration story can be parallel to our own experiences, along with creating empathy and understanding for others. The following are 5 strong quotes from the memoir related to immigration we can discuss as a class. These quotes are among the strongest pieces of textual evidence for themes from the memoir.

1. “My parents escaped Viet Nam on a boat so their children could grow up in freedom.” (p. 30) This quote captures the central meaning for the family’s immigration: sacrificing everything to give the next generation safety, opportunity and freedom.
2. “We were now BOAT PEOPLE – five among hundreds of thousands of refugees flooding into neighboring countries, seeking asylum.” (p. 267) Bui emphasizes that her family was part of a much bigger refugee crisis, highlighting the uncertainty and danger faced by people fleeing Vietnam.
3. “The refugee camp was also a place where many people reinvented themselves.” (p. 269) This quote shows how immigration often required refugees to reshape their identities – changing names, ages, or family relationships – in hopes of building a new life.
4. “Our cousins were older and had been in America for three years already ... ‘Don’t be such a REFUGEE!’” (p. 285) This moment illustrates the pressure immigrants feel to fit into American culture and the embarrassment that can come with being seen as different.
5. “This – not any particular piece of Vietnamese culture – is my inheritance: the inexplicable need and extraordinary ability to RUN when the shit hits the fan. My Refugee Reflex.” (p. 305) Bui reflects on how the experience of forced migration continues to shape her identity long after resettlement, showing that the emotional impact of escape can last for generations.

“Suburban Refugees – Class and Resistance in Little Saigon” (2025) an ethnography by Jennifer Huynh will expand our understanding that refugees make use of family reunification categories to bring family members who then come to the U.S. as immigrants, not refugees. In her introduction, Huynh states “Half of the American population —predominantly families with children—live in the suburbs. Upon arriving, newcomers

are more likely to settle in suburbia than cities, and over the past thirty years, suburban immigrants have become more likely than US-born suburbanites to experience material poverty.”²⁴ Huynh continues “After over twenty years of US military intervention in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the United States accepted nine hundred thousand Vietnamese refugees between 1975 and 2000 through a variety of policy programs.”²⁵ Huynh argues that suburbs are not harmonious havens but act as spaces of intense class struggle and displacement for marginalized communities. The book documents how working-class Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants resist exploitation as a community.

The Oral History Interview

After diving deep into the works Bui and Huynh, I will prepare the students for the focus of their project: *The Oral History Interview*. The students need to understand oral history is twofold: 1) the method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the memories of people who witnessed past events, and 2) the resulting transcription. Rather than focusing on official documents, the oral interview centers personal narratives and everyday experiences to provide a more inclusive record of the past; recording memories and emotions which are often not captured in official archives.

*Who Built America Project*²⁶ is a free digital open educational resource and primary source repository created by the American History Project at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). It surveys the nation’s past to show the role working people played in the making of modern America. On this site, we can access digitized audio and text interviews, explore historical audio clips and transcripts, browse related federal archive collections and explore the open educational resource update from the Labor and Working-Class History Association (LAWCHA), all to assist with the oral interview.

How to get started with an Oral Interview

1. The student needs to choose a willing person to interview, one possessing firsthand knowledge of their immigration story.
2. The student must be well prepared: All questions pre-decided with excellent recording capabilities (written, record, video, etc.)
3. The student interviewer and interviewee share the conscious goal of creating a historical record.
4. Both parties sign a contract agreeing to the terms of use of the oral history and transcript.
5. These records are made accessible to future generations.

Student Activities with the Oral Interview

1. Preparation: Formulate questions. This will be a wonderful small-group project. Divide the class into small groups, and each group will create a list of interview questions. A ‘share-out’ of the small groups will create a master list.
2. Equipment: The students can record the interview (video or audio, or both) with their phones. We can spend class preparing with ‘mock’ interviews with other classmates. If preferred, a student can choose to handwrite or type the interview on their computer.
3. Consent: Ensure the interviewee signs a release form granting permission for the recording to be used.
4. Questioning: Prepare open-ended questions, starting with early life or background before moving into

specific historical topics.

5. Preservation: Transcribe the recording.
6. Share: Optional reading of transcription to the class.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This curriculum unit will effectively use Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts – 10th grade. These standards can be easily cross-referenced to other standards.

10.1.L.1 and 10.1.S.1 Students will develop and apply effective communication skills to share ideas through speaking. Students will develop and apply effective communication skills through active listening.

10.2.R.1 and 10.2.W.1 Students will read and comprehend inclusive, diverse, and increasingly complex literary and informational texts. Students will engage in a recursive process that may include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

10.3.R.1 and 10.3.W.1 Students will analyze, interpret, and evaluate increasingly complex literary and informational texts that include a wide range of historical, cultural, ethnic, and global perspectives from a variety of genres. Students will thoughtfully and intentionally write, addressing a range of modes, purposes, and audiences.

10.4.R.1 and 10.4.W.1 Students will expand their grade-level vocabularies through reading, word study, and class discussion. Students will apply knowledge of vocabulary to speak and write effectively.

10.5.R.1 and 10.5.W.1 Students will expand and apply knowledge of grammar, usage, mechanics, and style to comprehend, analyze, and/or evaluate a variety of texts. Students will expand and apply knowledge of grammar, usage, mechanics, and style to speak and write effectively, demonstrating standard usage when appropriate.

10.6.R.1 and 10.6.W.1 Students will gather, comprehend, evaluate, and synthesize researched information to acquire and refine knowledge. Students will synthesize information ethically through speaking and writing.

Resources

The following resources can be used to gain in depth knowledge of immigrant laws, timelines and immigrant/refugee experiences.

Suarez-Orozco, Carola and Marco. “Children of Immigration” (Harvard University Press, 2001). This book explores the critical but often forgotten chapter of the immigration experience: the children of immigrants. They make up 20 percent of all youth in the United States and are an integral part of the American fabric. Children of immigrants face immense pressure to be perfect, and this book explores three core themes how the youth in immigrant families adapt to life, school and work in the United States. Family life explores how

moving to a new country changes family roles, rules, and ties between parents and children. School adaptation looks at how children learn a new language, fit in with peers and face the challenges of the American school system. Finally, this book addresses social hurdles of poverty, social stress and prejudice on a child's chance to succeed.

Yung, Judy. *"Unbound Voices – A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco."* University of California Press, December 9, 1999. <https://www.amazon.com/Unbound-Voices-Judy-Yung/dp/0520218604>. This book contains wonderful examples of interview interrogation questions and documents from 1850 – 1945 showing the real lives, struggles and history of Chinese American women in their own words.

Huynh, Jennifer. *"Suburban Refugees – Class and Resistance in Little Saigon."* (University of California Press, March 2025). <https://www.ucpress.edu/books/suburban-refugees/paper>. This book examines in detail how Vietnamese refugees in California fight displacement, housing insecurity, and inequality in modern American suburbs.

Bui, Thi. *"The Best We Could Do."* (Abram Books, March 7, 2017). <https://www.scribd.com/document/765343680/Thi-Bui-the-Best-We-Could-Do>. Key essential student reading for this unit. It chronicles Bui's family's harrowing escape from war-torn South Vietnam in the 1970's, their life as refugees, and Bui's journey toward understanding her parents after having a child of her own.

Yung, Judy and Lee, Erika. *"Angel Island – Immigrant Gateway to America."* (Oxford University Press, 2010). https://www.alibris.com/search/books/isbn/9780199734085?invid=18852150580&utm_source

An excellent read with many historic photos. While most people are taught about Ellis Island in New York, Angel Island in San Francisco tells a different, deeply moving side of American immigration. While Ellis Island welcomed millions with open arms, Angel Island was often the opposite - a filter, detainer and exclusionist of people. Operating from 1910 to 1940, Angel Island processed over half a million immigrants, not only Chinese, but Japanese, Korean, South Asian, Russian, Jewish and Mexican families. Many were fleeing political persecution. Japan had annexed Korea in 1910, and the Koreans were fleeing a harsh life under Japanese colonial rule. India's population was fleeing for similar reasons; by the early twentieth century, political unrest and massive discontent with British colonialism had set the stage for an unprecedented migration of South Asians to North America. Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America is a vital, gritty look at America's complicated history with race, policy, and national identity. Ask the students: Who gets to be an American, and who decides?

"Who Built America?" American Social Histories Project. Reading is essential for this unit to implement the oral history interview assignment. <https://whobuiltamerica.org/item/making-sense-of-oral-history>.

Waters, Mary, Ueda, Reed and Marrow, Helen. *"The New Americans: a guide to immigration since 1965"* (Harvard University Press Reference Library, 2007). <https://www.amazon.com/New-Americans-Immigration-University-Reference/dp/0674023579>.

Immigration and Ethnic History Society <https://immigrationhistory.org>. Essential unit timeline.

Suarez-Orozco, Carola and Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo. *"Children of Immigration."* (Harvard University Press, 2001). <https://www.amazon.com/s?k=children+of+immigration+suarez+orozco&adgrpid>. Explores how growing up in immigrant families affects young people in the United States, looking closely at family changes, school life, and social adjustment.

Notes

1. There's no term officially named the "Mexican Exclusion Act." However, this term is frequently used to refer to the **Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929**, which resulted in the prosecution of over 44,000 unlawful entry cases by the end of 1930s.
<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/undesirable-aliens-act-of-1929-bleases-law/>
2. The detention barracks on Angle Island served as a processing and confinement facility for hundreds of thousands of immigrants from 1910-1940, primarily enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act.
3. The process of adopting the values, behaviors, and customs of a new culture while keeping part of one's own original culture.
4. Rubén G. Rumbaut is a Cuban American sociologist and Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine, renowned for his research on immigration, refugee resettlement, and generational transitions.
5. While the definitions 1st Generation, 1.5 Generation, 2nd Generation and 3rd Generation are standard for the U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada, there can be minor variations in how different cultures and academic institutions use the terminology.
6. Oklahoma Great Schools: <https://www.greatschools.org/oklahoma/tulsa/1565-East-Central-High-School/>
7. Immigration History Timeline <https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/>
8. 'Free White Persons' ='White male property owners' [https://immigrationhistory.org/background/paragraph 2.](https://immigrationhistory.org/background/paragraph%20.)
9. San Diego State University <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1875Immigration%20Act.pdf> SEC. 3.
10. Densho Encyclopedia https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Picture_brides/
11. Judy Yung "Unbound Voices: A Documented History of Chinese Women in San Francisco" (University of California Press, 1999). Jew Law Ying's Coaching Book, 39 & 40.
12. A restrictive geographic zone created by the U.S., limiting annual immigration visas to 100 per country.
13. Embarking on leaky and overcrowded boats on dangerous seas to escape countries of violence.
14. A person is forced to flee their home country due to war, violence, or persecution.
15. 2001 federal law that expanded surveillance powers, enhanced information sharing, and increased penalties for terrorism. President G.W. Bush signed into law October 26, 2001.
16. Mandated biometrics on travel documents, required interagency information sharing among law enforcement, and expanded tracking for foreign students.
17. Traditional, knee-length breeches made of leather.
18. A racist stereotype mustache that embodies the 'Yellow Peril' - a 19th and 20th-century Western fear of East Asians.
19. Ancient musical horn, typically made from a ram's horn.
20. Thi, Bui: "The Best We Could Do" (Abrahm/Marks publishing, 2017), 1-336.
<https://www.amazon.com/Best-We-Could-Do-Illustrated/dp/1419718770>
21. Lack of basic physical and financial resources needed to live, such as food, proper housing, and money.
22. U.S. immigrations policy between 1975 and 2000 shifted from accommodating Cold War refugees to emphasizing border enforcement, employer sanctions and legal caps. Key legislative programs from this era include the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, the Refugee Act of 1980, and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.
23. <https://whobuiltamerica.org/item/making-sense-of-oral-history> Making Sense of Oral History offers a place for students and teachers to begin working with oral history as historical evidence. Written by Linda Shopes, this guide presents an overview of oral history, tips on questions to ask when reading or

listening to oral history interviews, a sample interpretation of an interview, an annotated bibliography, and a guide to finding and using oral history online.

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