

Immigration: The Story of Us All

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Introduction

Immigration is always a hot topic, but being in an election year where presidential candidates are proposing to “build a wall” to keep illegal immigrants out, I feel my students might have a chance to be more invested than ever before. Most students have a preconceived notion about who immigrants are, where they come from and why they come here. I want them to see the people they are studying as actual individuals and not as some sort of faceless entity: “the immigrants.” I want my students to feel what immigrants feel and experience (as best we can in a classroom setting) what immigrants go through on their journey to the United States. After all our country was founded on immigration: a concept that many have forgotten. As a Spanish teacher, immigration is a key topic for Hispanic people and the United States. It is core to their story as a culture. This topic has never been investigated in our curriculum as of yet, and thus why bringing this controversial theme to the forefront of our Level 3 Spanish classes is even more important.

This unit is designed for a Level 3 Spanish class, with a variety of learners in mind. We will be learning in ways that will assist all learning styles, auditory, visual and kinesthetic. In the past we have always focused our units more on the grammatical structures and less on the culture of the people. In the proficiency model of World Language education, we focus more on the theme and less on the grammar. That’s not to say that grammar is thrown out the window, but rather a discovery by students, guided by teachers and no longer taught for the sake of the grammar. As we are aligning everything with the six main themes of the AP exam (Beauty and Aesthetics, Contemporary Life, Families and Communities, Global Challenges, Personal and Public Identities, and Science and Technology), I have decided to use immigration and storytelling as a way for students to not only understand the issues of immigrants, but also be able to talk about things that have happened in the past. This will help to contextualize the difficult structures of past tense in the Spanish language and also help students to understand the struggles of the people who are trying to make a better life in the United States. I want my students to see the world through a different lens, even if for a short period, and be able to tell their own story using the Spanish language.

Background

I have chosen to use biographies to get my students to connect with the people they are studying. High school students can often remove themselves from the actual people related to a topic. Their lives are lived in a virtual world and they are all too apt to remove themselves from situations and emotions. I want them to not only understand the

people they are reading about, I want them to CARE about those people. I am using biographies from children (under 18) who have emigrated alone from their home countries as anchor stories for my student groupings. I feel that my students might be able to relate to immigrants that are in their age range. It will allow them to think about if they could go through what they people they are reading about are going through. Could I travel alone? Could I live off little money and food? How would I protect myself in dangerous situations? They will have a better chance of putting themselves in someone else's shoes if those shoes are worn by their peers.

The biographies I have chosen to base the anchor stories on mainly come from Susan Terrio's book, *Whose Child Am I?: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Children in U.S. Immigration Custody*. In her book, Susan Terrio was able to meet and document the stories of several young people from a variety of backgrounds. I chose her stories because the children all left home alone, they are all under 18 years of age, they come from different Spanish speaking countries and they all have different reasons for leaving home. The stories have been modified to fit in the format we will be using in class, as well as translated into an appropriate level of Spanish for my students.

In our seminar, we have discussed epic stories that contain a hero fighting against some sort of injustice. This is directly related to the immigrant. We are the heroes of our own stories. These immigrants have chosen to leave unjust situations and become their own heroes. They battle evil in different ways and suffer their own consequences along the way, but they do their best to win the war. They will better their own futures and hopefully influence future generations to continue bettering their own situations.

My School

Middletown High School is part of the Appoquinimink School District, located in New Castle County, Delaware. The student population at Middletown High School consists of grades 9-12 in the primarily suburban to rural regions of Middletown, Odessa, and Townsend, Delaware. Our school population of just over 1500 students is fairly racially diverse. We consist of primarily Caucasian students with approximately 20% minority students of African-American, Latino, or Asian/Pacific Islander ethnic backgrounds.

While we have children at the elementary level attending classes of several foreign language options, the secondary levels lead students in a way that prepares them for post-secondary opportunities at universities, the military, or full-time careers. Our school currently offers Spanish, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and American Sign Language. We also offer a college level Linguistics course that focuses on the science of language and how it impacts society rather than focusing on how to communicate in another language. Since students are required to have 2 credits of the same foreign language to graduate, we are seeing more and more students that need accommodations in order to be successful. Due to this shift we have also added a Spanish Language and Culture course that is designed for students with IEPs or those in need of more than the

average accommodations. All of these factors allowed us to add an additional World Language teacher to our department this year.

I foresee that soon we will be in need of more teachers due to our district's career pathway requirement. For the students graduating in 2017 or 2018, the requirements for a career pathway in World Language are less rigorous than the future. These students need 2 credits of the same language to graduate, but they need 3 more classes in the same or another World Language to fulfill the pathway need. Many students will take up to level 4, 5, AP (if offered in their language) and/or an additional course in Linguistics to complete the pathway. However, for all graduating classes beyond 2018, the pathway requirements have changed. In order to complete a World Language Pathway in the Appoquinimink School District, students must complete 4 credits of the same language plus 3 more credits. Those additional credits must be (1) a language level 5 or AP, (2) Linguistics and (3) a language and career capstone course. The capstone project requires students to demonstrate use of the target language in a variety of settings. Students will be eligible to apply for a Seal of Biliteracy upon successful completion of all requirements.

Unit Audience

This unit is designed with a Level 3 Spanish class in mind. The theme of immigration falls into the AP theme of: Families and Communities. I feel that the topic of immigration could be useful in other disciplines as well. In a history class, immigration is a common theme around the world, especially in the history of our own country. Immigration is not just a Hispanic issue. Currently in our country we are also very concerned with immigrants and refugees from the Middle East. Since this unit is focusing on a specific group of immigrants, the teacher could easily vary who the stories come from to illustrate what they need to in their particular class. This unit could be used in a Sociology setting as well: what are the reasons for people to leave home, what did they go through and how did that affect them for their future dealings with other people?

Proficiency Based Learning in World Languages

In the World Language education community, we have changed our focus for our students. Gone are the days of rote memorization and verb conjugation charts. Now we want to focus on what students can DO with the language. It's more about proficiency and less about perfectly correct grammar. The focus is communication, communication, communication. Throughout the district, our world language programs follow American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards, assessing reading, listening, writing, and speaking, with culture contextualized within each unit. This unit aims to incorporate the 5 C's of world language (Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Communities and Connections) into one unit where the analysis of one aspect of the target language culture through the target language allows for connections outside of the classroom and comparison between peoples.

Proficiency requires a mind shift for both the teachers and the students. We are all used to the worksheets to practice verb conjugations and translating sentences to make sure you can put it all together. However, creating language in a more natural and realistic setting is something new to all of us. For the teacher, you have to get used to teaching 80% of the time or more in the target language. It's tough to get kids to stay on task and not check out because they haven't been trained to listen to another language for such periods of time. It takes more planning and strategic choice of words to make sure the class understands the assignment. You can't be afraid to act out with your explanation. Also, the teacher now has to rethink the how students will get information. It's not just lecturing and giving the notes anymore. We have to guide students to discover the information for themselves. Grading is another shift. True, we have fewer assignments in the gradebook, but those assignments demonstrate so much all together. The grading is more labor intensive since it is more writing and speaking and less fill in the blank and matching.

For the students, the mind shift has to occur in their confidence level, fear level and perfection level. So many students have been trained to get each blank correct. Spelling and accents would lose you points. Didn't conjugate that verb correctly...minus one point. Now, students have to be willing to really focus on what the teacher is saying since it's in the target language. It improves their listening skills tremendously. Students also need to be able to speak more, or at least try. Speaking activities were so contrived in the past. It was awkward and only with the teacher. They never got a chance to just talk to each other in the target language. It's scary for them. In the proficiency classroom, they are given more opportunities to speak and are required to speak more often: not just for assessments, but also for in class discussions as well. Many students miss the old worksheets to perfect their grammatical or vocabulary skills. However, they have to learn that creating sentences and paragraphs, work the same skills just in context now. It's that context that makes the proficiency classroom work. Big changes develop for them throughout the class time. Students go from scared and apprehensive to confident and willing to try anything. They are able to experience their progress by completing more and more complicated work. It's not just a grade on a test anymore. It's what can I do with the language?

Learning/Teaching strategies

In the Proficiency model of world language, students are given options for assignments to help them feel more comfortable in pushing themselves further. It also allows students who might be more advanced to really take on a new task that will give them the opportunity to try something new. A choice board is just such an assignment. Choice boards can be set up in many different ways, but most of them give students different scenarios/formats for completing a particular assignment or mode of communication. For example, a choice board can ask students to complete a task, but allow them to write it as an essay, or record a video, etc. A choice board can also have students complete slightly different tasks that demonstrate the same knowledge. For example: have a conversation

with a friend about a work of art, create a power point about a work of art or create a brochure about a work of art. These are very simplified examples, but they show how a choice board can allow students take control of their education and feel confident about what they are producing.

For this unit, I will be focusing more on the presentational writing/speaking mode of communication for our choice board assessment. Presentational modes are defined in a way that allows students to present information that may have been practiced or prepared ahead of time. It is NOT thinking on your feet or a conversation where information goes both ways. The information is one directional and done in a more formal way. There are 3 main choices for students in this unit's assessment. Each option also includes many formats that they can use as well. The idea here is to give students the power to complete the assignment in a way that allows them to use their strengths. If they are not familiar or comfortable writing a song, for example, then it's not a requirement. They can simply choose a different format. Students get to make the decisions and thus they buy in to the activity and are more likely to be successful. First, students can investigate more about the train, "La Bestia," and prepare a story from the perspective of the immigrant who is traveling using that train. Students will need to *become* the immigrant and relate their journey as themselves. Their story can use any of the following formats: book, song, essay, movie, comic strip or poem. The second option is finding a video on Youtube from a reputable news source (approved by the teacher) about an immigrant. They will then tell that immigrant's story from the perspective of a viewer. In this option, the student is an outsider looking in. He will have to not only retell the story, but add in information about how he was impacted or felt. Both options one and two require the student to have a level of empathic understanding about the immigrant. Once again, choice two allows students to pick the format: book, song, essay, movie, comic strip or poem. For option three in the choice board, students will have to truly understand the issues of an immigrant, because they will be able to interview a current English as a Second Language (ESL) student in our school. They are required to choose a student who is a fairly new arrival to the United States and not a friend that came here as a 7 year old. They must create the interview questions and have them approved by the teacher. This option is much more sensitive since many immigrants are not comfortable talking about their journey to the United States. If a student chooses option three, they must ask permission from the ESL student. If the ESL student declines, then another option will have to be chosen. Once again, the story of the immigrant needs to be relayed in one of the formats given: book, song, essay, movie, comic strip or poem. All tasks for any of the options of the choice board must be completed in the target language and be appropriately formatted. The formats for the choice board were actually chosen from a brainstorming activity with the students about what ways tell stories. Once again, this is a way for students to have input into their own assessments.

In proficiency world language, we also believe that information coming in to the students should be as authentic as possible. Gone are the days of the cheesy tape

recordings of your teachers or other speakers that slow down their speech or worksheets that are created by your teacher for specific skills. The department isn't writing paragraphs for you to read and answer questions about. Now, we try to find authentic texts and stories that will work for the level of the language learner, but still push them just a little more. Using authentic texts is a great way to expose students to more and varied vocabulary without having them feel the need to memorize it all for a test. Infographics based on the theme of immigration are a great way to get kids extra vocabulary and higher thinking information without overwhelming them with lots of text. They can feel comfortable with a potentially tougher level of language because it isn't paragraphs and paragraphs to read. I have found several and feel that they are quite effective for my students.

In the Appoquinimink School District, we use Kagan strategies to get our students equally involved. Kagan structures are management type techniques that will have all students engaged in an activity an equal percentage of the time. They are designed for students to help each other to complete the task. Some are quick and easy, while others take a little practice to use. These structures will help me make sure that all students are engaged and no one is "hiding" from participation. These structures require all students to participate to complete the activity and prevent that one student who rarely likes to participate. So far my students have enjoyed using Quiz-Quiz-Trade for vocabulary practice. In Quiz-Quiz-Trade, each student is given a card with a vocabulary question on it. All students circulate throughout the room and find a partner. Once a partner is found, each student then "quizzes" their partner by asking the vocabulary question on the card in turn. When both have answered, they trade cards and find a new partner. Each time they must find a new partner and should do their best to talk to me as a partner in the time allotted. It's a little more fun than just flashcards and they get moving around the room. For this unit, the Quiz-Quiz-Trade will be a little more involved. Students will have a sentence with a verb missing. They must figure out what tense and what conjugation they will need to use.

Round Robin is another Kagan strategy that gets kids talking and leaves no one out. For a Round Robin, each student gives one item of input for discussion in turn. They go around the circle as many times as they can within the time frame given OR when they can think of nothing else to add. This is a great strategy for brainstorming. It gets each kid talking and taking turns to add to the group discussion.

Learning Objectives

Each group of students will be given an immigrant identity (ie Carlos, Maribel, Corina, Ernesto, Angel, Pedro, Daniela or Santiago) as the anchor story for that group. Every other day students will be given an "update" on their immigrant. I want my students to buy into the story of a real person and what they went through to try to get to the United States. I have created a couple of fictional identities due to the need for 8 anchor stories. I also wanted to use a couple of stories that are NOT based on a real person to see if the

students have a harder time buying in to these particular stories. Each time the group receives an update on their immigrant, they will read and take some preliminary notes (so as not to forget the whole story) on a graphic organizer and make some predictions in Spanish among the group members. Since each group has a different identity, they cannot discuss with other tables about their person just yet. This lessens the amount of reading each student has to do and gives them a sense of ownership to an individual. It also allows for higher level students to help those that might be struggling a bit. As a society it is easier for us to care about an individual than a group of people. And my hope is that they come in eager for updates about their immigrant as if it were someone they actually knew.

The stories I have chosen to base my “anchor” stories on were chosen for a variety of reasons. First, they are all children under 18 traveling without adults. I feel that my students will be able to better relate to immigrants of their own age range and have more empathy for what these immigrants go through along the way. They were also chosen because they are coming from different countries and backgrounds. They are all choosing to leave their homes for different reasons, as well. I have included brief summaries of the each of the anchor stories I will use in class.

Carlos is from El Salvador. He was raised on a farm and forced to work long hours instead of getting to go to school. He wants to learn more than anything, but he is not allowed to since the family requires his labor skills in the fields to feed the family. On his journey he was detained and put into a detention center where he had some issues with other boys in the home.

Maribel is from Honduras. Her father is a womanizer and an alcoholic. She has watched her dad molest her sisters and abuse her mother. She doesn't want to end up married at a young age dealing with the same situations as her mother. Along the way, she was captured and taken to a group home for illegal immigrants. There one of the supervisor women tried to have sex with her and she refused. She dealt with more physical abuse because of this.

Ernesto is also from Honduras, but he is the illegitimate son of a very wealthy man who does not acknowledge him. His stepfather forces him to work in the fields and like to tease him about things he would like to have. His journey included being kidnapped by a gang and terrorized for money. Eventually he tried to swim across the Rio Grande.

Pedro is 9 and from Honduras. He was orphaned by 5 and shuffled around from family member to family member. At 9 his grandmother died and he didn't know how he would survive if he stayed in Honduras. He begged for food and water and a family took him in and helped him get rid of his parasites. He worked for them but eventually left and continued to get to the USA.

Corina is from Guatemala. She comes from a huge family and her parents are much older. She wants to go to school, but has to work to help feed the family. She is tired of

all the different abuses that happen at home and decides to leave. Her smugglers tried to extort additional money from her family by lying to them. She had to walk through the Arizona desert without food or water.

Daniela is from the Dominican Republic. She is from a family with very dark skin and is discriminated against all the time. Random men beat up her father and rape her sister. She needs to get out. She takes the “train of death” to journey north. Along the way she is injured and loses her foot. She is forced to return to home and live the rest of her life with one limb.

Santiago is from Guatemala. All around him is war. The militia in his area take young boys all the time and force them to fight. He doesn’t want this fate for himself, so he flees. He is confronted with much gang violence and does his best to steer clear of it, but they capture him and no one knows what happened to him in the long run.

Ángel is from Mexico. He wants to go to school, but his family can’t afford it, so he works. His older brother is always beating him up and generally being mean to him. He decides to leave so maybe he can go to school. Along his journey, he worked for different people to gain food and money. Eventually he is put in a detention center where there is 24 hour light and no heat.

Throughout the unit students will be exposed to more than just their “anchor story.” We will look at statistics about immigration through infographics (Appendix 3 & 4) and videos. During the unit students will be reviewing, learning and using both past tenses in Spanish through interpretive readings, interpersonal communication and presentational writing. As a culmination of the unit, students will be given a choice board (Appendix 2) to choose how they will write their summative assessment: a story of immigration.

In seminar, we discussed that stories take many forms. Stories are not only books. They began as lists and evolved into other formats. Using this idea, I want to allow my students to find a format for their story that will grant them the chance to use their strengths and passions. We will do a brainstorming session as to what types of formats that stories can take. Using their ideas, we will develop the choice board for the final summative assessment. This will allow us to mold the assessment to the ideas of the students that are currently in the course. This will ensure student buy in and hopefully result in better assessments since they will have had input into part of the assignment.

Classroom Activities

Formative Speaking Assessment

My students will be comparing anchor stories with other students in a formative speaking assessment. Students will be given a graphic organizer to take notes on each of the other anchor stories they will hear about. Students will find a partner from another anchor story. They will introduce themselves AS the anchor story character. Each student will need to give a brief summary of their anchor story up to this point in Spanish. The student

that is NOT speaking, should be taking notes on the graphic organizer in Spanish to make sure they understand what is being told to them. Then the roles will switch. Students are encouraged to ask questions for clarification or if they would like to know more. They are required to speak to someone from each of the seven other anchor stories. During this time, the teacher will rotate around the room and give colored cards to the students as they speak. Each card represents 1 of 3 levels of speaking proficiency: exceeds expectation, meets expectation and approaching expectation. Students may have their card color changed based on how well they perform, improve or not. At the end of the last round, the color card the student ends up with equate to a numerical grade for the grade book. I do not tell my students ahead of time which color represents which proficiency level. They have a tendency to self-sabotage when they know.

Discovering Grammatical Information

In order to help students discover grammatical concepts on their own, we will use the anchor stories to pull out conjugated verbs from the text. As a group, students will make a list of ALL verbs they see in the anchor story chunk for that day. They should list the verbs in the form that they exist in the story (conjugated, infinitive, etc.) Next students will, as a group, categorize that big list of verbs based on any verb tenses/conjugations they have already learned. They should have groups that include Preterit, Infinitive, Present, Progressive, etc. Hopefully, students will see not only how much they already know, but that there is a group of verbs that they don't recognize. Hopefully students will see that there are patterns in those verbs they don't recognize. The teacher will lead a discussion that allows the students to figure out on their own what the conjugations for those verbs are AND what this tense tells us. Since, Spanish has two simple past tenses, knowing when to use each tense can be a bit difficult. We will discuss what situations the imperfect verbs occur in. This will help them understand the "why" of this particular tense.

Creative Writing Activity

Writing is difficult for many students in their own language. In another language that they don't feel confident with, it can be even more daunting to students. Because of this, I am going to work them into the idea of creative writing in Spanish. Students very rarely get the chance to be creative in another language nor are they taught how to think outside the box. With proficiency, we want to illicit real language and that includes creative thoughts.

We will do a round robin story writing activity to get kids more comfortable writing in Spanish. Each student will put a character, location and problem at the top of their paper. They will be given 2 minutes to begin a story about those 3 things in the target language. After 2 minutes, they will pass their paper to the next person in a clockwise rotation. The new person has 2 minutes to continue the story. This will repeat 4-5 times, depending on class time available. At the end of those rotations they will receive their original paper back. They will read over what direction the story has taken and decide if they will use

all, some or none of the story that is on the paper. They will then spend 20-30 minutes to make what they have into a more cohesive story; make it their own. Students will be able to see that writing in Spanish isn't as scary as they thought it would be. The next day in class, students will be peer evaluating using the presentational writing rubric from class. Each student will read one story from another person. They will indicate their scores by circling them on the rubric. The teacher will then use the very same rubric and circle new scores so that they writer will be able to see how similar or different the teacher and peer would grade them. Ultimately, the teacher score is the grade for the assignment. This will prepare them for the final summative story they will have to write.

Appendix 1

Implementing District Standards

Many of the ACTFL standards are met in this unit. Specifically this unit will meet the following standards: Communication: interpersonal (between people), interpretive (reading) and presentational (one-way presenting of information), Cultures: Relating cultural practices to perspectives (understanding why people do what they do), Connections: Acquiring information and diverse perspectives (understanding from someone else's perspective), Comparisons: Language comparison (understanding the target language as it compares to their native language), Cultural comparison (understanding cultural differences as they compare to their own culture).

Notes

Terrio, Susan. 2015. *Whose Child Am I?: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Children in U.S. Immigration Custody*. Oakland: University of California Press.

This book documented several young people who immigrated to the United States without parents or family to assist them. It describes the conditions in which they traveled and lived during their journey.

Ultreras, Pedro, interview by Jorge Ramos. 2014. *La Bestia* (July 27).

This interview discussed a documentary about the conditions that immigrants dealt with while using the train "La Bestia" to travel north through Central America. The interviewer rides the actual train and interviews people that are currently on the train.

Unknown. 2014. *Azteca Noticias*. May 22. Accessed September 15, 2016.

<http://www.aztecanoticias.com.mx/infografias/583/la-bestia-el-tren-de-la-muerte>.

This is an infographic that gives information about the train "La Bestia" and summarizes data to make it more student friendly.

—. 2015. *Pinterest*. October 16. Accessed September 10, 2016. <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/4f/4c/67/4f4c6760351ce8f057398510c89b7110.jpg>.

This is an infographic that summarized information and data about children that immigrate to the United States.

2013. *Living on One Dollar*. Directed by Sean Leonard, Chris Temple Zach Ingrasci.

This documentary follows 4 young men trying to live in a small village in Guatemala. They are trying to live very much the same way the people in that village live. They allot themselves very little money to simulate how the villagers live. They live in a home just like the villagers, and they deal with everyday issues of the villagers in that area.

¹ Susan Terrio's book documented stories from child immigrants that she was researching to find out more about how the immigration process works.