

Teaching Immigration

THE UNITED STATES has always been a nation of immigrants, with many newcomers to our country currently learning in our public schools. Working with these students and their families often presents educators with a different set of rewards and challenges. Some immigrant students may be fluent in English and used to school routines, while others are not only new to the language, but also new to formal education itself.

Being the “new kid” and fitting in at school is hard enough for any child, but the degree of adjustment often faced by recent immigrants can seem especially daunting. Fortunately, educators can help ensure that school environments are safe places for immigrants to learn. And just as important, teachers can serve as trusted sources for immigrant families seeking essential information.

In partnership with the AFT’s human rights department, Share My Lesson has created a special collection of resources designed to empower educators and other school staff in their efforts to establish safe and welcoming learning environments for immigrants and their families. The collection explores the following themes: immigration policy and rights, building an inclusive classroom, the immigrant experience, and mental health resources. Teachers and advocacy groups have contributed more than 50 resources in the form of engaging lessons, blogs, and professional development.

Make Your Classroom Environment Count

Establishing a culture where all students feel welcome and safe takes work and is crucial for successfully managing a classroom. Dispelling stereotypes through open dialogue and encouraging empathy is one way to build community among students. To that end, Tina Yalen, a National Board certified civics teacher, created a lesson for her middle school students, titled “Lemon Exercise in Stereotyping,” that can be adapted to students of all ages.

Another way educators can send an inclusive message to students is by posting signs on classroom doors to show that all students are welcome. The AFT offers a colorful poster welcoming students in eight languages, featuring the work of Favianna Rodriguez, an American artist and activist.

Integrate Immigration into Your Curriculum

The topics we teach send important messages to students. Incorporating lessons or activities showing how immigrants contribute to our country can foster understanding and build empathy among students.

The Global Oneness Project, which features a collection of films, photo essays, and articles exploring cultural, social, and environmental issues, offers a new lesson plan, “A Refugee’s Story,” based on the short film *Welcome to Canada*, about a young Syrian refugee who was granted asylum in Canada.

Watching or listening to news stories and then discussing them as a class is a great way to begin conversations about immigration. Share My Lesson’s “Today’s News, Tomorrow’s Lesson” collection features current events from partners like *PBS NewsHour*, *Listenwise*, *Science Friday*, and the Anti-Defamation League.

Know Where to Find Support

All students have different needs and goals, and students who are immigrants are no exception. Familiarize yourself and your students with organizations dedicated to meeting the needs of immigrant students and their families. ColorinColorado.org is a terrific resource that provides information, activities, and advice for educators and families of English language learners.

When it comes to challenges that go beyond the scope of instruction, teachers can direct students to counselors equipped to handle serious situations. For information on mental health issues specific to immigrants, the National Institute of Mental Health and the American Psychological Association are two helpful resources.

Know Your Rights

Information is power. The AFT can help educators ensure that immigrant students and their families know their rights when responding to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

For more information, visit ShareMyLesson.com.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM



FAVIANNA RODRIGUEZ, WWW.CULTURESTRIKE.ORG

Recommended Resources

See Share My Lesson’s immigration collection at www.sharemylesson.com/immigration, which includes:

- “Lemon Exercise in Stereotyping”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml1>
- “AFT Immigration Poster: DREAMers Welcome”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml2>
- “A Refugee’s Story”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml3>
- “Today’s News, Tomorrow’s Lesson”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml4>
- Colorín Colorado resources: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml5>
- “Psychology of Immigration 101”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml6>
- “A Resource Guide to Help Protect and Prepare Immigrant Youth and Families for an ICE Raid”: <http://go.aft.org/AE117sml7>

Looking for a particular set of resources? Send an email to help@sharemylesson.com.