

Analyzing Immigrant Interviews

Background:

Drawing on oral history interviews of immigrants and other story collecting projects of the Chicago History Museum, this activity asks students to read and analyze short interview excerpts to further their own content knowledge, make inferences, and develop a sense of empathy for people who immigrated to the United States.

Suggested Activity Directions:

- Split students into small groups and have them analyze the immigrant interviews (using a chart pad or the graphic organizer included in this packet to record their findings) for the following:
 - Key Details
 - Inferences
 - Tone of the interview
 - What is one question you would ask this person?
- As a wrap up question, ask students:
 - What was your reaction to this interview?
 - What is something new you learned from this interview?

Contents of this Packet:

- State Standard Alignment
- Excerpts from 6 Immigrant Interviews
 - Lakshami Menon — India
 - Mary Sanchez — Cuba
 - Teresa Fraga — Mexico
 - Lucyna Migala — Poland
 - Irina Uman — Ukraine (at the time of this experience, Soviet Union)
 - Van — Vietnam
- Worksheet for Classroom Instruction

Extension Activity:

- To enhance this analysis, add objects, photographs or other primary sources to represent the countries of origin for the immigrants.
- Ask students to draft their own interview questions and if possible conduct the interviews.

This activity was derived from the SCIM-C strategy — Summarize, Contextualize, Inferring, Monitoring, Corroborating, Interpretation. For more information visit: <http://historicalinquiry.com/>

Some of the text in this packet was part of the Neighborhoods: Keepers of Culture project by the Chicago History Museum.

State and National Standards Alignments

Middle School

CCSS Anchor Standards:

- Reading 1, 4 & 7
- Writing 1 & 7
- Speaking and Listening 1 & 4
-

IL Social Science Standards 6-8:

- Inquiry Skills
 - SS.IS.5.6-8.MdC
 - SS.IS.6.6-8.MdC
- Civics
 - SS.Civ.1.6-8.MC
 - SS.Civ.2.6-8.MC
- History
 - SS.H.1.6-8.MC
 - SS.H.3.6-8.MdC
 - SS.H.4.6-8.MC

NCSS

- Domain 1
 - D1.1.6-8
- Domain 2
 - D2.Civ.1.6-8
 - D2.Civ.2.6-8
 - D2.His.3.6-8
 - D2.His.4.6-8
 - D2.His.9.6-8
 - D2.His.14.6-8
- Domain 3
 - D3.4.6-8

High School

CCSS Anchor Standards:

- Reading 1, 4 & 7
- Writing 1 & 7
- Speaking and Listening 1 & 4
-

IL Social Science Standards 9-12:

- Inquiry Skills
 - SS.IS.5.9-12
 - SS.IS.6.9-12
- Civics
 - SS.CV.1.9-12
 - SS.CV.2.9-12
- History
 - SS.H.5.9-12
 - SS.H.7.9-12
 - SS.H.11.9-12

NCSS

- Domain 1
 - D1.1.9-12
- Domain 2
 - D2.Civ.1.9-12
 - D2.Civ.2.9-12
 - D2.His.3.9-12
 - D2.His.4.9-12
 - D2.His.9.9-12
 - D2.His.14.9-12
- Domain 3
 - D3.4.9-12

My name is Lakshami Menon.

In India, in the mid-and late 60's, the first generation of youngsters who were born after Indian Independence was just about to enter the job market...That's when those recruiting agents happened to come there...to talk to universities. In fact, at my husband's medical school they came and they encouraged all the students there to take this exam which would make them eligible to come to the U.S. and work.

Most of us at that time, we were very cautious about the United States. We thought we knew all about it from the movies. And it was kind of interesting to go and actually live there and see what life in American would be like.

And it was sort of in that spirit of adventure that we packed our bags and said goodbye to our parents. We were quite sure we were going to come back after a couple years, but what happened, once we got here, was that we found we liked it.

My name is Mary Sanchez.

I was born in Cuba. With the political situation, my family had to leave our country. We came to the United States when I was 10 years old. At first we went to Miami, with some of our extended family. When my father got a job with Zenith, we moved to Chicago.

The hardest thing for me was not speaking English. I loved math because then the language did not matter, and I could do as well as the other kids in my class. Luckily, my sister and I had a wonderful teacher who worked with us after school every day to learn English. Being children, and in a situation where we needed to use English all the time, we learned quickly.

Today I work for a large company as a computer programmer. I married an American (Polish heritage) and have a baby boy. I am proud of my past and one way I remember Cuba is by eating special foods. My favorite dish is Cuban pork with garlic sauce and rice and beans. My father cooks the pork all day. My American family members also love this meal and when both sides of my family get together they always hope my father will bring it. I am bilingual and hope to raise my son the same.

My name is Teresa Fraga.

In 1966 my grandmother said, “you’ve got to go to Chicago. There you can work in a factory. It’s more stable and you don’t have to be traveling all over the country.”

We had to cross a river in the pitch dark of the night. When it was so dark, it feels like we are not doing something the right way. We’re sneaking in, and we knew it was illegal. Even though I was a little girl at age 7, when you are poor, you know what is going on, you sense what is going on. My mother was praying the rosary and my father was not with us, he had left prior to the crossing.

It was difficult arriving, it was also difficult not knowing the language. It was difficult knowing this was just such a totally different setting. It was like you were going from one planet to another.

My name is Lucyna Migala.

I was born in Poland during WWII. My family left Poland when I was 3 years old. We came to America because my father was actually an American citizen. He was born in the United States—in Chicago. Then his mother became ill and could not work anymore, so she returned to Poland with her children. My father grew up in Poland, married and started his family.

He returned to the United States with us in 1947 to escape Communism. He was trained as an agricultural economist, an expert at agricultural planning. The Communists wanted him to become a party member, but he refused. He was arrested three times and tortured. After the third time, he knew he could not survive another arrest and started making plans to leave. He had buried his passport during the war to keep it hidden and safe. He recovered it and presented it at the embassy.

He could have left quickly, but he did not want to go without the rest of our family—my mother, my two siblings, and myself. His brother (my uncle) lived in Chicago and was active in Democratic politics. He knew a senator who intervened to speed up the paperwork. You see time was very short because the American embassy was closing— they were burning documents and shutting down. We flew on a military plane to a boat. They were holding the last boat waiting to leave until we arrived.

I don't remember the boat trip very well because I was sick the whole time. I remember being called up to the deck to see the Statue of Liberty. Everyone was excited, but I was young and did not know what the Statue of Liberty was. I mostly remember seeing the lights of New York City—I had never seen so many lights and thought they were beautiful. Whenever I see lights on the horizon, I think of coming to America.

My name is Irina Uman.

In 1957, I was born to a Jewish family in Kiev, Ukraine (then part of the Soviet Union). I had a happy childhood, with a large extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as my parents and siblings. When I grew older, I became aware of Soviet anti-Semitism. In school, my work, and that of my Jewish classmates, was graded more severely than that of the rest of the class. I wanted to be a teacher, but as a Jew, I was denied entry into that profession. Instead, I trained to be an electrical engineer. I met my future husband, Alexander, at work and we were married in 1978.

Alexander and I lived in a small one-room apartment and shared a nearby kitchen with two other families. When we married, we had decided that one day we would leave the Soviet Union. We submitted applications to immigrate, but were denied. Fortunately, we did not lose our jobs, but many people we knew did not approve of our wish to immigrate. Soon, Alexander and I had two young sons. When the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl exploded in 1986, I worried about the health of my family and I did not trust the official government pronouncements that the region was not exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.

Finally, in the late 1980s we were allowed to immigrate. I had a cousin who lived in Chicago, so we came to live here. I miss my parents and other family members, but hope that one day they can join us. It is better here for my children. I think my sons will have a real life. Here they will be able to choose to be whatever they want.

My name is Van.

I was nine years old when I came to the United States. My first day in America was like being in a prison. I didn't have friends. I didn't speak any English. And it was so cold! I was used to the warm weather in Vietnam. I really wanted to go home.

My family came to the United States for more freedom and so that I could get a better education. Going to school is very expensive in Vietnam. Plus, you don't get that many opportunities there. Here, if you work hard, you can do anything. I'd like to be a pharmacist some day, to help people who are sick. I strive to do well in school so I will succeed.

I remember when I heard that we were leaving Vietnam, I kept thinking: Will it be the same in America? What is that country like? Will I ever make friends there like I have in Vietnam?

Today I love the United States. This is the country where I want to stay for the rest of my life. I would like to go back to Vietnam only to see my older sister. She is married and has children, and she stayed behind. The day we left Vietnam without her, I felt like a part of myself was missing. Except for my sister, I don't even think about Vietnam anymore. America is my home.

Analyzing Immigrant Interviews

Name: _____

Read the immigrant's interview and fill in the chart; describing key details, inferences, tone of the interview, and questions you have for this individual.

Name of Immigrant : _____ Approx. age at time of immigration: _____

Country of Origin: _____ Time period when immigrated: _____

<u>Key Details:</u>	<u>Inferences:</u>
<u>Tone of the Narrative:</u>	<u>Questions for this person:</u>

What are your reactions to this person's story?
