Student Curriculum Project:
Immigration to the United States in the Twentieth Century

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Introduction:

This curriculum, created for a de-tracked, eighth grade social studies classroom in a Hartford magnet school, aims to educate students about immigration to the United States in the twentieth century. More specifically, this curriculum was designed with Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy (HMTCA) in mind because of the school’s commitment to student achievement and preparation for college on the broader scale. The subject matter begins in the early twentieth century, focusing on European immigration, and ends in the late twentieth century, focusing on Latin American immigration. Because the Hartford community is majority minority, more specifically the majority of the Hartford population is Latino, it is fitting that the curriculum addresses Latin American immigration (Hartford Strategic School Profile, 2). Furthermore, it is crucial to incorporate information about other immigrant groups besides European immigrants, such as Asia and Latin America, to ensure a multicultural curriculum.

Context:

This curriculum is designed for eighth grade students. This class is set up for a public school class in Hartford, Connecticut. The curriculum is a social studies lesson on the immigration patterns of multiple ethnic groups. The lesson, which will be taught over the course of five consecutive days, meets the standards for the Connecticut State Department of Education for Social Studies, as well as the Common Core Curriculum for Social Studies and English instruction. More specifically, this curriculum draws from the Connecticut State Department’s College, Career, and Civil (C3) Framework, a program implemented to prepare Connecticut students to be engaged and motivated college students and productive members of society. This unit encompasses both English and Social Studies to broaden what is taught in a typical Social
Studies classroom. The incorporation of multicultural approaches to education reform and cooperative learning promotes student’s higher-level thinking in addition to preparing students for the coursework in high school and eventually college. The curriculum is aimed to inform students about the multifaceted heritage of the United States by focusing on immigration to the East and West coasts by way of Ellis Island and Angel Island Immigration Stations. Finally, students will compare immigration in the first half of the twentieth century to issues regarding immigration today.

**Objectives:**

1. **Students will investigate different cultures and their immigration patterns.**

   This objective aims to address the issue of a lack of a multicultural approach to education. As illustrated by James Banks in his *Multicultural Education*, European and Western-centric education “negatively influences students of color [and] marginalizes their experiences and cultures and does not reflect their dreams, hopes, and perspectives” (Banks, 243). Additionally, Banks offers the point that a mainstream-centric education (European and Western-centric) hurts white students in the sense that they are being robbed of a full understanding of other cultures and racism and ethnocentrism are being constantly reinforced (Banks, 242). By incorporating Asian and Latin American immigration, this curriculum offers a multicultural approach to a curriculum that is generally focused around European immigration.

2. **Students will improve their writing and critical reading abilities, which will greatly benefit them in the future at the high school and eventually college levels.**
In accordance to the goals set forth in Strategic Operating Plan, which appears in the 2011 and 2012 Hartford district Strategic Profile, this curriculum was built to fulfil Goal 2 of middle school redesign. The middle school redesign incorporates strategies to include developmentally appropriate themes, group learning processes, current technologies, leadership development, opportunities and practices that excite and engage every learner as he or she transitions from childhood to the teenage years of high school. The expectation is for all middle grades students to demonstrate sustained performance gains that will prepare them for the rigor of a college-ready high school curriculum (Hartford Strategic School Profile, 8).

In order to achieve this, the curriculum draws upon themes such as Robert Slavin’s Cooperative Learning and includes activities that feature group work and discussion. In addition, the curriculum is designed to promote interest and success in higher education, which is further emphasized in the C3 Framework of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s Social Studies Framework. This is illustrated in a number of the activities proposed in the curriculum. Moreover, the magnetization of Hartford public schools has increased the graduation rate by 25% and the curriculum aims to not only support that figure, but also to increase it (Hartford Strategic School Profile, 8).

3. **Students will develop the skills to compare historical events regarding immigration in the early twentieth century to immigration in the late twentieth century using data, maps, and primary sources.**

Comparing and contrasting the experiences of different immigrant groups is a crucial developmental skill for student advancement through high school and later on college. The Connecticut Department of Education Social Studies Framework outlines eight expectations that students in grade six through eight should fulfil. These expectations range from “constructing arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources” and “Present adaptations of
arguments and explanations on topics of interest to others to reach audiences” to “critiquing arguments for credibility” and “critiquing the structures of explanation” (Connecticut, Dept. of Education, 89).

4. Students will assess their knowledge of the immigration process in the twentieth century and draw parallels to today’s political rhetoric surrounding immigration and its effects on American voters.

One of the main purposes of education is to socialize students to become informed citizens. By gaining the capability to relate issues surrounding immigration during certain periods of the nineteenth century to the debate surrounding immigration in the current election cycle, students will start to transform into critical members of society. The analysis of current political rhetoric surrounding immigration will reinforce student’s ability to fulfil the expectations set forth by the Department of Education’s Social Studies Framework as well as the C3 Framework: “Social studies instructors should emphasize skills and practices that prepare students for informed and engaged participation in civic life” (Connecticut, Dept. of Education, 2).

Activities:

Day 1: Introduction to Immigration

The first day of the unit will be a general introduction to the American immigration process in the 1900’s. First, we will assign readings about Ellis Island and Angel Island. These readings will be due on the first day of the unit, so that the students are able to enter the classroom with background knowledge on what they will be learning in the coming week. The class will be instructed to meet in the library to have access to the computers. Students will then
explore two different online resources that track immigration patterns from 1880 through 2000 (See resource list). We will do this for the first 25 minutes of the class period. The students will be asked to take detailed notes on the trends that they observe about each immigrant group. If the technology fails, teachers will have printed copies of the online resources that can be viewed in the classroom.

We will then return to the classroom for the remaining class time and discuss what the students found when researching the websites. We will guide the discussion with sample questions but will have the students run the main group discussion. Some questions that would start off the discussion would include, “At what point do the immigrant demographics change? (Western European to Eastern and Southern European? European to Latin American?) In what regions did certain immigrant groups settle?”

**Day 2: Group Work**

This day will be based off Robert Slavin’s Jigsaw II Cooperative Learning principle. The students will be divided into four groups of five with other students that read about the same country for homework the night before. The groups will be carefully picked by the teacher to ensure that all genders, abilities, and ethnicities are equally represented (Slavin, 6). Each student will read excerpts from a pre-selected book about their country.

In class, students will discuss what they learned about their assigned country for the first 20 minutes. The students will become “experts” on their country by discussing what they read the night before. Following the small group discussion, each group will then present the major findings of their reading to the rest of the class acting as the teachers. If time permits, the students will be encouraged to ask questions and further discuss and compare the readings and
immigration groups and how their journeys to America and experiences relate to one another (Slavin, 6). At the end of class on this day, we will distribute a rubric to the students for the in-class writing activity that will take place on Wednesday. We will distribute the rubric a day in advance to give students the opportunity to adequately prepare for the assignment and know what will be expected of them in the activity (see resource list for rubric).

Day 3: Letter to Home

Day three will be centered around a writing activity. Students will write letters back to their “home country” based on a country of their choosing. Students will be asked to draw on specific examples based on what was assigned for homework and what was discussed in class on Tuesday. The letters will discuss the immigrant experience and based on what they learned the previous day students will be able to give a detailed description to questions posed, such as where they came from, where they are currently living, and how their journey to America was. By writing the letter, students will fulfil part of the Connecticut Common Core requirement for 8th grade reading and writing. The students will be evaluated based on the rubric given to the students (See resource list for writing prompt and rubric).

Once we are halfway through the class period, the students will hand in what they have written in their letter and we will watch a video for the remaining class time entitled “Virtual Field Trip to Ellis Island” (See resource list). This will give the students more insight on the experiences and difficulties faced by people attempting to migrate to America by means of Ellis Island.

Day 4: Immigration to Ellis Island!
This day will be focused on a full class activity in which students will act out the scenario of arriving at Ellis Island. This activity will allow the students to view first hand what the immigrants experienced when attempting to immigrate to America. The students will know how to act based on the video that they watched in class on the previous day. When the students arrive to class, the classroom will be reorganized to make moving through “Ellis Island” easier. The students will act as the immigrants in this situation, while teachers from neighboring classrooms, that do not have class at this time, will act as the inspectors that decide who will continue through the immigration process and who will be rejected access to becoming a citizen. The students will move through different inspection stations (primary, medical, detention, and deportation). Some students will make it through all the steps of the inspection and will become American citizens, while others will get deported back to their home countries and will not get to become citizens. Every third student will be deported to avoid any bias on the part of the teachers and the students will then have the opportunity to start the activity over and eventually obtain a visa.

Day 5: Class Discussion

Day five will be a class discussion and reflection on what the unit covered during the week. More specifically, students will be encouraged to discuss the current climate surrounding immigration to the United States and compare it to the history of immigration in the first half of the twentieth century. This final class will promote the students’ ability to not only look at society through a critical lens, but also promote student action regarding immigration and racial inequalities. While the discussion will be largely student led and based off their thoughts and opinions on the speeches they viewed the night before, the students will be prompted by
questions such as “What are the stances of each candidate and how are they similar or different from one another?”, “Does the candidate’s stance differ from that of his or her party?”, and “How do you think the language used by each candidate affects the opinions of American voters?”. This final class was structured with Banks’s Social Action Approach in mind, meaning that the students will be trained to “make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them” (Banks, 246). At the end of the class there will be a ten minute free write for students to reflect upon and process the discussion and what was learned over the course of the past week. Self-evaluations will then be distributed so students can assess how they believe the performed during the implementation of the curriculum. The self-evaluation will pose as an additional resource to assist teachers in evaluating student performance. (See resource list for video links)

**Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated on the performance on the letter writing activity, participation in small groups and class discussions, and their own self-evaluations. While not every student has to be consistently outspoken in small groups and discussions, the curriculum is best achieved when students are constantly engaged and do not shy away from offering an opinion or answer during discussion. The goal of distributing a different student rubric is to make the student more aware of the teacher’s expectations. Additionally, the students’ self-evaluation acts as a means for the teacher to understand how a student believes he or she is performing in the class. The self-evaluation will also provide the student with the ability to express what he or she found helpful and interesting about the curriculum as well as what they would like to change about it.

**Conclusion:**
Immigration to the United States in the Twentieth Century is a curriculum that incorporates a number of practices posed by educational theorists, such as Robert Slavin’s Cooperative Learning and James A. Banks’s Multicultural Education. In addition, when implemented in a detracked eighth grade classroom in a Hartford magnet school, the curriculum promotes interest in high school success and higher education; two aspects whose importance is stressed in the Common Core, the Connecticut State Department of Education’s Social Studies Framework, and the Hartford district Strategic School Profile. The activities proposed in the curriculum were designed to create a warm environment that fosters active student participation in the social studies course. By incorporating modern debates surrounding immigration, the curriculum not only educates students on current politics, but also prepares them to develop the ability to think critically when looking at their own communities and the society in which they live.
In Class and School Resources:
- Computers in the school’s library
- Common Core State Standards
- Connecticut State Department of Education for Social Studies
- Interactive Tour of Ellis Island (http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tour/)
- Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Scholastic Immigration Data (http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/immigration_data/)

Homework Resources:
- Reading excerpts from the following books:
- Videos
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7LwXi0nO9c (Overall description of current immigration policy)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqSp6_ny6og (Democratic debate questions on immigration)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFgCQ0VG-8s (Democratic debate questions on deportation of illegal immigrants)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8i5OOslFZo (CNN interview with Donald Trump regarding his stance on immigration)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ9eHb4WsHU (Republican debate questions on immigration)
Grading Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/ Overall Argument</td>
<td>General argument is coherent, demonstrates a full understanding of concepts learned, and draws on examples from the reading and class discussion.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Letter includes rich detail and successfully places oneself in the shoes of an immigrant.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Proper word choice and syntax</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Includes introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Test Grade</td>
<td>60</td>
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Writing Prompt:

Name: ____________________

Letter Writing Activity

Imagine you just arrived in the United States from a country of your choosing. Write a letter to a family member back home. Where did you come from and what did you leave behind? Where are you living now? How was the journey over to the United States? Are you employed? If so, what is your job? Please draw on examples from our discussion last class and the assigned readings. While writing please keep in mind the rubric, which was distributed last class. (Use the back if necessary.)
Works Cited:


