BECOMING US

TEACHER RESOURCES FOR A MORE ACCURATE AND INCLUSIVE MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION NARRATIVE

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY BEHRING CENTER

Smithsonian
“American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.”

The National Museum of American History debuted this guide in September 2019 to provide an entry into teaching migration and immigration history and links to online curricula.

In 2014 the museum embarked on a pan-institutional journey to research, document, interpret, and present U.S. history through the lens of migration and immigration. This effort resulted in the exhibition Many Voices, One Nation; the scholarly book Many Voices, One Nation: Material Culture Reflections on Race and Migration in the United States; and Becoming US, the national education curricula.

Becoming US is based on rigorous research that includes:

- a survey of all 50 states’ social studies standards and interviews with curriculum developers on when and how migration and immigration history is taught;
- a survey of Smithsonian Affiliations museums and interviews with museum educators to identify related projects and existing resources;
- focus groups with teachers, students, and museum educators to understand needs that new curricula could support;
- pilot projects in Los Angeles, California, and in Montgomery County, Maryland;
- an Open Space convening with artists, teachers, curriculum writers, anthropologists, historians, educators, and scholars to address how best to engage youth in learning about migration and immigration history; and
- a partnership with the University of Maryland to conduct evaluations with teachers on how Becoming US supports current social studies teaching.

Becoming US was also guided by a team of education experts: Maureen Costello, director of Teaching Tolerance; Kathy Swan, PhD, associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Kentucky; Josh Radinsky, PhD, associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Chicago; Margie Ortiz, Department of Interpretation, National Park Service Headquarters; Naomi Coquillon, senior advisor, Informal Learning and Experience Design, Library of Congress; and Bill Yeingst and Nancy Davis, curators emeriti, National Museum of American History.

Throughout the research and development, Becoming US partnered with a number of different organizations, including the University of Maryland, the National Park Service, the Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and Smithsonian Affiliations.

Becoming US is supported with grants from the Smithsonian’s Understanding the American Experience Consortium, Youth Access Grants, Smithsonian–University of Maryland Seed Research Grants, the National Park Service, and the Kettering Foundation.

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Teacher resources for a more accurate and inclusive migration and immigration narrative

Fifty years after passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the United States is a nation with an immigrant population of 13%. Approximately a quarter of American youths come from an immigrant family or are immigrants themselves. Despite these demographics and the nation’s history of immigration, incorporation, and importation of people to the land that is now the United States, most school curricula leave out key truths and themes about how people become American and exist in the nation together. Becoming US provides resources to change how this theme is taught across schools, museums, and historic places.

Our research indicates that the teaching of migration history is fragmented. The 2015 study Reframing the Teaching and Learning of Migration/Immigration in U.S. History conducted by the University of Maryland and the National Museum of American History identified gaps in teaching areas such as the Great Migration, African American slavery as involuntary migration, and post-1965 immigrant/migrant experiences. Stories of migration are a constant in American history, and history curricula should be more inclusive in order to be accurate. Research also indicates an inconsistent use of terminology, at times loaded with American exceptionalism and nativist connotations.

At the center of Becoming US is the understanding that some people were already in the land that is today the United States, some people were brought against their will, some people came voluntarily, and some people never moved but became part of the United States as its border expanded to include them. The resources included in Becoming US offer an inclusive and accurate approach to teaching the American experience.

We invite you to visit americanhistory.si.edu/becoming-us.

https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Numbers
Framework for Essential Understandings about Immigration/Migration History

*Becoming US* is designed to reframe the way we teach and learn about U.S. history. The following criteria outline recommendations for a more robust, critical, and culturally relevant approach to teaching about immigration and migration in U.S. history.

1. **Connected**: Is the history of immigration/migration in the United States covered in a way that shows the past as connected to and relevant in the present?

2. **Complex**: Is American culture and history described as the result of complex and dynamic patterns of immigration/migration?

3. **Relevant**: Is immigration/migration investigated in a way that builds understanding of its effect on personal, family, community, and national identity?

4. **Inclusive**: Is immigration/migration explored in a way that builds an understanding that we are all part of and central to the American story, and that we are all migrants or immigrants in some way?

5. **Specific**: Is immigration/migration discussed using specific language instead of general/vague language?

6. **Interdisciplinary**: Is immigration/migration explored in a way that connects to the study of history, civics, geography, and economics?

7. **Contextualized**: Are the patterns of immigration/migration discussed from political, social, economic, and cultural angles?

8. **Thematic**: Is immigration/migration presented thematically, as well as chronologically?

9. **Balanced**: Is immigration/migration covered without bias and without giving more attention to one specific time period or group?

*Becoming US* examines immigration and migration history thematically. Each theme works within both the national and local narrative of immigration/migration. As they encourage an understanding of a more accurate, inclusive, and textured national story, they connect the larger story to the local and contemporary community students experience where they live.

*Becoming US* is anchored in five thematic units: Borderlands, Education, Policy, Resistance, and Belonging. These units align with national standards: Common Core, 21st-Century Skills, and Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework.

This guide is based on the ten themes proposed by the National Council for the Social Studies. Here, we provide you with key concepts related to each theme and how educators can connect with the themes in *Becoming US*. 
The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of U.S. migrant cultures and cultural diversity. Culture is a result of human socialization. People acquire knowledge and values by interacting with other people through common language, place, and community. In the United States, there is vast cultural diversity among past and current migrant communities.

American experiences through culture create communities that are both diverse and similar to each other. Complex American cultures are revealed by diversity of language, literature, music, arts and artifacts, and foods.

**Key Concepts**

> There is no single American culture, language, or narrative.

> American cultures have always been dynamic and changing.

> Family relationships, community connections, and geographical factors have always been and continue to be essential in shaping the cultures of individuals living in the United States.

> Differences, perceived or real, between cultural groups have sometimes caused abuse, prejudice, and violence.

> The cultural diversity of the United States is similar to other nations around the world, particularly post-colonial nations, but also unique in important ways.

Teaching connection to *Becoming US: “Borderlands”*
Essential Understanding 2

TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of migrant history and its legacy. The historical and contemporary experiences of migrants reveal enduring contributions to U.S. values, ideals, and traditions. Beginning with the founding of the United States and continuing into the 21st century, migrants have been integral players in political, cultural, and social matters. Understanding U.S. history requires understanding migrant history.

Key Concepts

> Migrant communities are integral to U.S. history. They brought and have taken their stories and interpretations of the past and present throughout the continent.

> Since its beginning, the history of the United States has been a history of movement: borders have moved and people have moved across and within them. These border crossings and internal movements were forced and/or voluntary.

> Constant migration across and within the United States by diverse peoples has created varied regions with particular culture, music, art, and foodways.

> Continued movement means that regional histories and identities are dynamic. They shape and are shaped by their communities.

> Written, performed, spoken, and built artifacts recorded and preserve these varied histories.

> Hearing, reading, and seeing U.S. history from a migrant perspective is vital; it is an important perspective necessary to understand U.S. history, culture, and identity as dynamic, not static.

> Providing a migrant context and perspective facilitates an interpretation of world history as migrant history in that the movement of people has shaped and continues to shape contemporary life.

Essential Understanding 3

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of U.S. migration history, people, and places. For centuries, people have moved and settled in diverse landscapes, exploring and exploiting natural resources while negotiating with others. These interactions have continuously shaped communities and the places migrants live.

Key Concepts

> The U.S.-Mexico border was created as a result of a war by which the United States acquired extensive land and incorporated the people who lived on that land. Those circumstances have contemporary relevance.

> Urban centers have long been arenas of engagement between newcomers and native-born residents.

> Borderlands are both natural and created by humans; they are places of contention and exchange.

> Understanding migration plays a central role in understanding issues of land dispossession and removal.

> The American landscape includes native plants and animals and has incorporated additions from all over the world.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Borderlands,” “Belonging,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 4
INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity among migrants to and within the United States. Individual development and identity are tied to culture and the forces that have influenced and changed culture over time, including ethnicity and race, class, the process of migration, and the receiving culture. U.S. culture is dynamic and adaptive in response to interactions with others, including migrants, and has been throughout its history.

Key Concepts

> Race is a social construct.
> Individual identities are shaped and continue to be shaped by many factors.
> The concept of race was aggravated by the forced migration of enslaved people.
> Changing beliefs and attitudes about what it means to be American have been impacted by migration to the United States.
> Arguments about national identity, security, and patriotism have been employed to target different groups at different times in U.S. history.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Education,” “Belonging,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 5
INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among migrant individuals, groups, and institutions, as well as with other cultures and societies. Migrants created social structures including institutions, societies, and organizations to operate and live in. Some of these structures became state institutions, some of them became civil service societies, non-governmental organizations, and solidarity groups. Migrants improvise and adapt, and shape and are shaped by, social structures in the United States.

Key Concepts

- Migrant communities, societies, and organizations impacted the daily lives of their members by providing health care, faith-based belonging, social services, and educational training.
- These organizations facilitated the development of social ties across and between family, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality-based affinity groups.
- Institutions and organizations have exerted influence on migrant communities. Those communities have stood in solidarity against these forces when necessary and maintained self-reliance.
- Several current state and federal institutions have been influenced by migrant communities and their institutions.
- A variety of state agencies were created to interact with migrant communities, individuals, and institutions.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Borderlands,” “Education,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 6

POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of how people living in the land that is now the United States create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance. For centuries, migrants have played a role in political thought and the historical development of various structures of power, authority, and governance. Migrants are also deeply affected by those structures, both positively and negatively. Debates about fundamental principles and values of constitutional democracy are at the core of political discourse about migration policy and civil rights.

Key Concepts

- Laws and policies are enacted to restrict, encourage, or reform migration in ways that exclude specific populations.
- Restrictions on immigration shape ideas of citizenship and belonging.
- The debate about international migration has evolved and persisted.
- The experiences of migrants have inspired and necessitated resistance efforts and created movements.
- Understanding migration plays a central role in understanding enslavement and liberation.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Borderlands,” “Education,” “Policy,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 7

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of how U.S. migrants created or adapted to economic systems, labor relationships, and the production and consumption of goods and services. Migrants have always contributed to U.S. economic growth. Their experiences and voices have influenced decision-making and outcomes on issues of production, consumption, and distribution.

Key Concepts

› Migrants have contributed and continue to contribute to the U.S. economic system as both consumers and producers.
› The U.S. economy depends on an influx of migrants to augment the workforce in a number of industries.
› U.S. labor shortages are a factor that draws migration to the United States.
› Migrants have been at the helm for American ingenuity and invention.
› Migrants were pulled to U.S. cities by the abundance of semi-skilled and low-skilled jobs, as well as other economic opportunities offered by an industrializing society.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Belonging,” “Policy,” and “Resistance”
The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of the development of migrant knowledge and the relationships between science, technology, and society in historical and contemporary migrant communities. Migrants have contributed to and been impacted by the progress of science and technology in the United States. Migrants have been central to innovations in fields ranging from agriculture, to computer engineering, to data collection and analysis, to communications. Understanding the connections forged between science, technology, and society over time in the United States requires a migrant perspective.

Key Concepts

- Knowledge created by migrants to and within the United States has informed and continues to inform our search for answers to our society’s most pressing needs.
- Migrant knowledge and innovation reflects the ties different communities forged with each other and to their environments over time. New knowledge was created through trial, tinkering, and testing.
- Migration—movement of people, goods, and ideas—is at the core of scientific innovation in several fields including agriculture, statistics, data collection and analysis, and communications.
- Migrant communities have been subjects and objects of scientific inquiry, which has helped and hindered their development over time.
- Migrant knowledge, innovations, and technologies have had global impact.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Belonging,” “Education,” “Policy,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 9
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of how migration has always been a global phenomenon. Since Europeans arrived on what we now consider U.S. land, people—whether forcibly or freely—have arrived from different places in the world. They have created communities, negotiated differences, and stayed connected to their communities of origin. Global connections have shaped culture, economic differences, and places. Migrants’ perspectives provide an understanding of the global connections that have shaped the United States.

Key Concepts

> The people of North America came from many cultures and spoke different languages long before the founding of the United States, even before European contact.

> The great European powers competed for wealth, territory, and global influence. That competition brought hundreds of thousands of Europeans and Africans to the North American continent, where Native peoples had lived for millennia.

> Colonization brought growing numbers of Europeans and enslaved Africans. Contact brought economic and cultural exchange, but also wars and epidemic diseases that devastated many Native societies.

> With few restrictions on U.S. immigration until the late 1800s, peoples from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in the Americas arrived to the United States seeking land and economic opportunity.

> Migrant and refugee populations increasingly settled in communities that were previously less diverse. Tensions arose from these rapid changes and played out in different places where Americans continued to define and negotiate their identity.

> Some immigrants lead transnational lives, building global networks by traveling regularly between the United States and their homelands for business, social, or diplomatic reasons. They often retain ties to their homelands, sending remittances through money and goods to family and communities in their home countries.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Borderlands,” “Belonging,” “Policy,” and “Resistance”
Essential Understanding 10

CIVIL IDEALS AND PRACTICES

The 21st-century classroom should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in relationship to migrants and migrant policy. An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of citizenship. The rights and responsibilities of individuals have been defined by the values, morals, and beliefs common to their cultures. Active and involved citizenship is central to the U.S. experience. Migrants have both been active citizens and have been denied access to the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship throughout American history.

Key Concepts

➤ Notions of belonging impact participation in a democracy.
➤ Changes in immigration policy have affected who is considered a citizen and how and when migrants could exercise their rights and civic responsibilities.
➤ American history has been propelled by the power of individuals and groups who have resisted anti-democratic practices.
➤ Xenophobia, forced migration, and deportation have affected individuals’ participation in democracy.
➤ Americans have grappled with questions of freedom, inclusion, and equality since the nation’s founding. They have struggled to answer these questions in the face of differing, sometimes competing, visions for the country.

Teaching connection to Becoming US: “Education,” “Belonging,” “Policy,” and “Resistance”
Immokalee Statue of Liberty, by Kat Rodriguez, 2000
National Museum of American History
Gift of Coalition of Immokalee Workers