

Lesson Plan: Nativism in the United States

By Rachel Roberson

Lesson opener

Quick write* prompt:

The United States has often been called a “nation of immigrants.” Do you think this statement is accurate? Why or why not?

Do you think immigrants are more welcome today than they were in the past, or less welcome? Explain your answer.



(Flag of the Know-Nothing Party, 1850, Wikipedia Commons)

**A quick write* allows students to jot down their thoughts before discussing the opening question. The activity helps increase participation and can make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.*

Objectives

- Students will analyze the factors that led to nativism at key points in American history.
- Students will evaluate how nativist policies have affected various immigrant groups in the United States.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What are the factors associated with nativism throughout American history? Are most immigrant groups eventually accepted or do some groups face more discrimination than others?

Debates over immigration and refugee resettlement have received a lot of attention this election year. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has made tough immigration enforcement a keystone of his campaign, pledging to build a wall between the United States and Mexico. While his rhetoric has made headlines, it's certainly not the first time a politician has questioned the loyalty and motives of immigrant groups or threatened to exclude them. In the past, nativist policies in the U.S. have resulted in widespread citizenship bans, mass deportations and mob violence against immigrant communities.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or have students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Nativism (n.)	The practice of blaming immigrants for major societal problems (e.g. crime, unemployment).
Discourse (n.)	A formal way to describe what people are talking and writing about publicly
Repeal (v.)	To officially cancel or retract a law, rule or policy
Scapegoat (n.)	A person or group of people blamed for a problem they didn't cause
Sentiment (n.)	A feeling or attitude

Activity

- Students read and annotate the graphic, [“Fear of Foreigners: A History of Nativism in America”](#) found on the Lowdown.
- Individually or in groups, students identify the historical factors that led to nativism by underlining or highlight evidence. Some factors are stated explicitly such as economic hardship and war. Some are implicit and require closer reading.
 - **Model the activity** using Benjamin Franklin’s statement at the top of the graphic. This will allow you to help students untangle his 18th century syntax and also identify racism as a primary factor of nativism. You will likely need to define *Germanize*, *Anglifying* and *complexion*, and explain how those of British descent believed themselves different and superior to immigrants from Germany. Franklin’s remark about complexion indicates that people of that time considered Germans to have a different skin color than the English, pointing to Franklin’s racism and fear of German immigrants. Today, we wouldn’t say that English and German people come from different racial backgrounds, an indication of how beliefs about immigrant groups can change over time.

Note: The graphic is printable as a whole comic or by individual frame. Using a free online annotation tool like [Hypothes.is](#) allows students to add comments directly. Visit these sites for a [quick teacher tutorial](#) and [further resources](#) .

Discussion questions

- What factors lead to nativism?
- Were you surprised by some of the immigrant groups that have been targets of nativism in the past? Which groups? Why were you surprised?

- Who does nativism benefit, if anyone? How so?
- Do you think Mexican and Muslim Americans, both current targets of nativism, will eventually be “woven into the patchwork quilt that makes America what it is,” as the end of the graphic suggests? Why or why not? Cite evidence to support your claims.
- Is nativism inherently wrong? If so, how can ordinary citizens stand up against it?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

- **KQED’s Do Now:** On Friday, Sept. 16, [KQED’s Do Now](#) will feature a question about the impact and history of nativism. Students can Tweet their answers to the question @KQEDedspace using the hashtag included in the post. Find [a guide to using Twitter with your students here](#).
- **A national platform for your students’ voices:** Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED’s student video project](#), My Backyard Campaign.
- **Investigate current attitudes about immigration** and how these ideas change over time using the [Pew Research Center’s immigration data](#). Data is updated constantly and students can explore a variety of topics and share their findings with the class using [piktochart](#), [plot.ly](#) or other free data display platforms.

Common Core standards and C3 framework standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
D2.His.1	Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical context.
D2.His.16	Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.