Lesson Plan: Is There Really An Immigration Line?

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Featured resources

Above the Noise: [What Does the Process of Becoming a U.S. Resident Actually Look Like?](#)

The Lowdown: [How We Got Here, the Roots of America's Incredibly Confusing Immigration System](#)

Opening quick write prompt:

What do you know about the process of how immigrants to the United States obtain a visa to work or a green card to remain permanently? How long do you think this process takes? (Make your best guess.)

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze current and past U.S. immigration and the variety of ways immigrants are granted visas.

- Students will evaluate the fairness and accessibility of immigration policies and write a response to the issue.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What does the process of becoming a U.S. resident look like? Is the U.S. immigration process fair to all immigrants? How would you improve the U.S. immigration system?

The debate over undocumented immigrants is often couched in terms of fairness, with calls for illegal arrivals to get "to the back of the line" behind those waiting for legal status. But rather than one orderly line to gain a visa or green card, there are an array of paths, and most of them are not determined by time spent waiting patiently. Without highly specialized skills, a relative already in the United States, or a pile of money to invest, immigrants from many countries must wait years, even decades, for their "turn" at a visa. This lesson explores the complex and confusing pathways to immigration in the context of past immigration policies and current calls for reform.

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 having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
animosity (n.)	Dislike, hatred *During hard economic times, **animosity** toward immigrants often increases.*
assimilated (adj.)	Becoming fully part of a different country or culture *Some early immigrants **assimilated** into American society and didn't continue traditions from their former countries.*
backlog (n.)	A large number of job, tasks or applications that are waiting to be finished *There is a **backlog** of green card applications waiting to be processed.*
coveted (adj.)	Having a strong desire for something you don't have *Green cards are **coveted** by those who want to immigrate to the United States.*
quota (n.)	An official limit on the number of people or things allowed *In the early 20th century, U.S. immigration policy centered on racist **quotas**, which favored immigrants from Western and Northern Europe.*

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to gauge what students already know about this issue.
  - o ***NOTE***: *Some students' families may be familiar with aspects of the immigration process. Invite personal stories along with information from other sources. If necessary, review classroom guidelines for respectful discussion.*

- Based on the students' responses and information in the overview, explain that there is no one process for immigrants to obtain a visa to work or reside in the U.S. permanently. Instead, there are different pathways that depend on the following five main factors. (Make a list on the board to reference later. D**on't** list the percentages yet!)
  - Country of origin
  - Family already living in the U.S. (*65%*)
  - A person's work skills (*highly skilled -15%, low skilled -4%*)
  - The amount of money you have (*1%*)
  - Refugee status (*5%*)

- Ask: Do you think the United States has always prioritized these factors? What other factors might have been prioritized in the past?

- Provide historical context using the interactive timeline on The Lowdown post. As a class or in small groups, discuss the ways immigrants, African slaves, temporary workers and others were or were not accepted into American society and factors that led to their inclusion or exclusion.

- o *Note: If you are short on time, start at 1917 with the Immigration Act of 1917. This will give students a background on policies that were reversed in 1965 to form the core of our current immigration system.*

- After discussing the evolution of immigration policy to the current system, watch the Above the Noise episode.
  - o **Stop the video at 1:24 and ask:** How did U.S. immigration priorities change after 1965?
  - o **Stop at 2:19:** Explain why there is a longer wait time for an immigrant from a large country like India than there is for someone from a smaller country like Mongolia?
  - o **Stop at 3:57:** Refer to the list of immigration factors. Write the percentages associated with each factor. Ask: How does the country you come from determine your chances of getting a green card? (Remember, only 7% of green cards each year can go to people from any one country. Even if you are a highly skilled worker from Mexico with family in the U.S., you'll still wait longer than someone from, say, Uruguay.)
  - o **Stop at 4:42:** What are the key differences between the Republican and Democratic ideas to reform immigration?
  - o **At the end of the video, ask students the final questions:** How do you think the United States should decide who gets in and who doesn't? How would you change the current system? (*Note: This discussion is intended to prepare them to post a comment on The Lowdown post.*)

- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to share their response to this issue in the comments section of The Lowdown. The first time they comment, students must sign in to Disqus, a free discussion app embedded in The Lowdown.
  - o To sign in to Disqus, click the "Comments" button at the bottom of the post.
  - o Click the blue "Get Started" button in the gray "Welcome to Disqus" box.
  - o Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
  - o After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Make and Share

- Individually or in small groups, students post in the comments section in response to their
  - o Responses should be supported by evidence from the Above the Noise episode, The Lowdown post, or other research on the topic.
  - o Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when replying to other comments.
- Students can create their own response or use the following questions as a starting point:
  - o **Make your case:** How would you change the current immigration system?
  - o **Share Out:** Do you or your family have a story about immigrating to the United States? Share it here!

Assessment/Reflection

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:
  - What have you learned about the process of immigrating to the United States? Did your opinion change or stay the same as you learned more about the issue?
  - What was it like to post your responses publically and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

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/Homework

Write/speak locally: Students turn their response to this issue into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting in an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit.

Common Core, NGSS and C3 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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
NGSS.SEP.7	Engaging in argument from evidence
NGSS.SEP.8	Obtaining, evaluating and communicating information
D2.Civ.13.6-8	Analyze the purposes, implementation, and consequences of public policies in multiple settings.