

300,000,000!

IN THE USA

Concept:

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants, but changing events have forced us to reexamine immigration policy throughout our history. Understanding the “push-pull” factors that encourage U.S. immigration and examining our national values and priorities today may help us formulate future immigration policy.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify “push-pull” factors that influence people’s decisions to immigrate to the United States.
- Evaluate a simulation as a model for migration and identify limitations.
- Evaluate four immigration policy options for the United States.
- Develop their own immigration policy based on their stated values and beliefs.

Subjects:

Social Studies, Civics, Family and Consumer Sciences, Geography, History

Skills:

Observation, critical thinking, inductive reasoning, sharing experiences, problem solving, reading comprehension, organizing and writing thoughts, defending a position with reasoned arguments.

Method:

Students participate in a brief simulation that helps them identify some of the reasons that people migrate from one place to another. Students examine four different immigration policy options for the United States and then develop their own.



Population



Migration



Quality of Life

A Nation of Immigrants

Introduction:

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants. This is a significant part of our demographic history – how our population has grown to 300 million people. From the earliest settlers to colonial America in the seventeenth century, our land has been a beacon to people from across the globe looking for opportunities for themselves and their families to live a decent life. Foreigners have come to our shores to escape famine, poverty, political and religious persecution, war and environmental degradation (the “push” factors) and to seek employment, education, safety, freedom and the chance to be reunited with family (the “pull” factors). The players may have changed over the centuries, but the “push-pull” factors have not.

The lesson begins with a brief simulation activity illustrating a prime reason people migrate (more opportunities in another place) and then moves to an examination of the history of immigration policy in the United States and a discussion and development of future policy options. The lesson may take several class periods to complete.

Materials:

About 150 pieces of candy

Masking tape (optional)

Copies of Student Reading, “Coming to America” (included in activity)

Copies of Student Reading, “U.S. Immigration Policy: What Should We Do? Policy Options” (print out from http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/immigration_options_000.pdf)

Copies of Student Worksheet, “My Option 5” (included in activity)

Part 1: People on the Move

Procedure:

1. Draw a line using tape or chalk that separates the class in half. Explain the rules:

“This line is a boundary dividing side A and side B. One by one, I am going to distribute candy to students on side A. Please refrain from eating the candy until I say it is time. If any person is caught grabbing pieces from another person or throwing the pieces, he or she will face a penalty. Any student may choose not to accept his or her allocated candy. Of course, general respect is expected from everyone.”

2. Circulate around side A and distribute the candy one at a time. Carry the bag with you to show a limited supply. Give candy only to students on side A. Avoid using the terms “side A students” and “side B students” because they imply a fixed identity. The object is to communicate that students receive candy based not on *who* they are, but *where* they are. There may be questions or objections to the proce-

sure. If needed, calmly explain that *the nature of the activity is to distribute the items unevenly*. People on side A receive candy; people on side B do not. If students on side B ask for some, tell them that you cannot give them any because they are not on side A. Do not discourage friends from sharing across the border, as long as they do not throw the candy. Also do not discourage students from moving across the border. Distribute candy to any student who moves to side A once he/she has settled in a fixed spot. Do not give any candy to students who move to side B. Do this until you have distributed all the candy pieces.

The expected result is that, by the end of the activity, some students will have moved from side B to side A. At the end of this activity, refrain from moving people back to their seats unless necessary.

Discussion Questions

Observations — What happened?

1. Did anyone switch sides? How many from A to B? How many from B to A?
2. Did anyone share pieces of candy with someone else?
3. Did anyone break the rules (i.e., grab or throw candy, eat candy before teacher gave O.K.)?
4. Did anyone try to receive candy out of order?

Reactions — How did/do people feel?

1. Describe your reactions during the activity (i.e., What you were thinking/feeling).
2. Was anyone angry? What or who was the object of the anger?
3. Assuming students switched sides: How did people on side A feel about people switching sides? How did people on side B feel about people switching sides?
4. If there were an infinite amount of candy, would feelings be the same?
5. For the students who switched to side A, what determined specifically where you went on side A?
6. Did anyone like/dislike the teacher during this activity? Why?
7. For the students who received the most pieces, how do you think you would have felt if you had been given the same number you have now, but side B had been given double that number?

Interpretations — What does it mean?

1. What do you think this exercise was designed to demonstrate?
2. In the real world, what might the pieces of candy represent?
3. In the real world, what might the two sides represent?
4. Consider someone on side A who decided not to play by the rules. What might that represent?
5. Consider if that person were caught and moved to side B or out of the game. What might side B represent? Who or what might the teacher represent?
6. Brainstorm two lists on the board for migration push factors and pull factors. Based on this activity, what

would you say is the major reason that people migrate?

Critical Thinking

1. Who in the class has moved from another country or state in his/her lifetime? Why?
2. Think about your ancestors. Where did they come from? Why did they migrate?
3. What are some of the limitations of this simulation? What important migration factors did the activity not demonstrate?

Simply moving to a wealthier region or country does not ensure a better quality of life, at least not right away. It often takes more than one generation for immigrants' socioeconomic status to approach that of the "average" American. They often must learn a new language and/or secure new job skills to earn more money. Also, people who migrate "illegally" are denied opportunities. The simulation primarily demonstrated the push-pull factors of migration that relate to wealth and better opportunities. It did not address other factors such as political, cultural and religious persecution; war; healthier environment and reuniting families.

4. There are big differences in resources between people in almost every society, yet the poor often do not migrate and become neighbors with the wealthy as this activity would seem to indicate they might. Why is this?
5. Why does this resource difference exist? Should we try to alleviate this difference? Can we? How?
6. There is a resource difference (of candy) in this room. What should be done?

This last question is a valuable problem-solving activity, and, as much as possible, it should be left to the students to decide upon and implement a plan. Help them implement whatever plan they choose (equal redistribution for instance), but do not impose a decision; help them decide on their own. The last step after redistribution, of course, is to eat the candy.

Part 2: Who Should Become Americans?*

Procedure

1. Distribute and assign copies of the Student Reading, "Coming to America."
2. Distribute copies of the Student Reading, "U.S. Immigration Policy: What Should We Do? Policy Options." This is an online resource from the Choices Program at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies and can be downloaded for free at http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/immigration_options_000.pdf.
3. After students have had a chance to read the Student Readings, distribute copies of the Student Worksheet, "My Option 5". Allow students time to work through the questions and develop their policy option. This could be done as homework or during class. Have students share their options either in small groups or as a class.

*Material in the Student Readings and the Student Worksheet were adapted by permission from *U.S. Immigration Policy in an Unsettled World*, a multi-day lesson plan developed by The Choices for the 21st

Century Education Program, a program of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies at Brown University, www.choices.edu.

Follow-up Activities:

1. As an individual or group project, have students explore and report on a large migration that occurred in history because of religious persecution, cultural warfare, labor shortages, food shortages, captivity/slavery, prolonged harsh weather, violence, prospect of riches, population pressures, etc. Many of these factors are related and overlap. Aim for variance between projects.
2. Have students interview someone who moved from another state or country. Explore that person's reasons for moving. Where are family members now? What was good about the move? What was most difficult? How does he/she view migration?
3. Invite a few guests into the classroom who can tell their migration stories, discuss their views and entertain questions from students.

Student Reading

Coming to America

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

The poet, Emma Lazarus, wrote these words in 1883. They were later added to the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, a landmark greeting millions of immigrants from Europe who landed at Ellis Island in New York Harbor from 1892 to 1954. The statue and these words have long symbolized that which is unique about American society — it is a nation of immigrants, a “melting pot” of people who have come here from around the globe in search of a better life.

The poem may suggest that Americans have historically welcomed new immigrants, especially the poor, with open arms. In truth, we have struggled continuously as a society to embrace new groups of foreigners, and the debates on how waves of immigrants shape our culture and economy (for better or worse) have been waged since our early days as a nation. Below is a brief timeline of immigration trends and policy in the United States.

The Early Years of Our Nation

The founding generations of the United States trace their roots primarily to the British Isles and other areas of northwestern Europe. Wars in Europe and America slow immigration during the late 1700’s and early 1800’s. Newcomers include Irish fleeing English rule and French escaping revolution. The Constitution says little about immigration and citizenship other than to make these issues the responsibility of the Congress. Before 1820, the United States does not even bother to count how many newcomers reach its shores by ship. Congress outlaws the importation of slaves in 1808. By this time, about 600,000 black Africans have been brought to the country against their will.

1840’s

A surging population in Europe and a potato blight (and resulting famine) in Ireland fuel immigration to the United States. The U.S. expansion in both size and industrialization in the 1800’s creates jobs for new immigrants in factories, farming, shipping and railroad building.

The Irish and Germans are the first Roman Catholics to arrive in large numbers in what is a predominantly Protestant nation, and they are met with a good deal of discrimination for their beliefs and lifestyles. The first organized opposition to open immigration emerges in the 1840’s with the creation of the American Party (also known as the “Know-Nothing Party” for the secretiveness of its members). They claim that Irish and German immigrants threaten to corrupt the country’s heritage, and they succeed in fomenting anti-immigration sentiment for the next several decades.

1880 – 1920

Large waves of immigrants arrive from southern and eastern Europe, filling the need for unskilled labor in the industrialized cities of the Northeast and Midwest. By 1900, 80 percent of New Yorkers are either born abroad or the children of immigrants.

Anti-immigration forces in Congress introduce bills to make literacy a requirement for entry to the U.S. as a means to reduce immigration from poorer countries. Such bills are opposed by business leaders seeking cheap

immigrant labor and are successfully vetoed by presidents from 1895-1915. In 1917, Congress is able to override President Wilson's veto on the literacy test legislation amidst the nationalistic spirit at the start of World War I.

1921- 1964

In 1921, Congress passes another restrictive law, creating immigration quotas on the basis of national origin. This serves as the basis of the National Origins Act of 1924, which limits the annual immigration quota of each European nationality to 2 percent of its proportion of the U.S. population in 1890. This sharply reduces immigration from southern and eastern Europe and closes the door to immigration from Asia until the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act slightly relaxes some of these restrictions. With such a strict quota system, immigration levels in the U.S. plummet. In the 1930s, the number of people emigrating from the United States actually exceeds the number of immigrants coming into the country.

Following World War II, Congress passes the Displaced Persons Act allowing admission of over 400,000 refugees from Europe, especially those escaping the new Soviet communism in Eastern Europe. During the 1950's and 1960's, a number of special bills are passed to accommodate such "escapees" from communist domination, the largest group coming from Cuba (700,000) after Fidel Castro's revolution there in 1959.

1965-1980

The civil rights movement of the 1960's forces lawmakers to reexamine the national origins quota system that has been in place for more than 40 years. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 is an important turning point in our nation's immigration policy. It replaces the old quota system with a set of seven preference categories, placing priority on reuniting families and attracting highly skilled professionals. This ushers in an unprecedented wave of immigration from Asia, especially of university-trained specialists in science and medicine. In the 1970's, the laws cap annual immigration to 290,000, not counting the immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. No more than 20,000 immigrants from any single country can enter the country legally. Despite the strict regulations, many more immigrants enter the country outside of the normal routes.

1980's – 1990's

In 1986, Congress attempts to tackle the issue of illegal immigration with passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which penalizes employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. It also grants amnesty to 3.2 million illegal immigrants, allowing them to become U.S. citizens. The Immigration Act of 1990 raises the limit on annual immigration from 290,000 to 675,000. Under the law, 71 percent of visas go to family members of U.S. citizens and permanent legal residents. The rest are set aside for well-trained workers and their families and for immigrants from countries that have received relatively few visas in recent years.

The Present Debate

Although newer laws are intended to streamline the immigration process, the system is slow and overburdened. Today, the backlog of visa applications from family members of U.S. citizens and legal residents totals about 3.6 million. Immigrants are drawn to the United States in record numbers. Although annual legal limits remain at 675,000 immigrants, the U.S. government estimates that about 350,000 additional immigrants settle permanently in the United States each year. These include students and visitors who overstay their visas, as well as migrants who have crossed the borders into the U.S. illegally.

As in other points throughout our history, our society is engaged in a debate about what U.S. immigration policy should be. Some considerations include whether current immigration levels strengthen or erode our economic vitality; how we should deal with high levels of illegal immigration from Latin America; and whether the overall population increase from newcomers places an undue burden on our natural resources and environmental health. A significant portion of U.S. population growth is due to legal and illegal immigration. As our population passes the 300 million mark, lawmakers are attempting to craft the latest chapter of U.S. immigration policy.

Name _____

Date _____

Student Worksheet
A Nation of Immigrants
My Option 5

The four policy options outlined in the Student Reading, “U.S. Policy Options: What Should We Do?” (http://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/immigration_options_000.pdf) present a range of possible policy directions and the consequences of each. Each of the four options is put in stark terms to highlight very different approaches.

Ranking the options

Which of the options do you prefer? Rank the options, with “1” being the best option for the United States to follow:

- ___ Option 1: Open Ourselves to the World
- ___ Option 2: Make Emigration Unnecessary
- ___ Option 3: Admit the Talent We Need
- ___ Option 4: Restrict Immigration

Option 5

Most likely, you are drawn to aspects of more than one option, and none entirely expresses your views. Now is your chance to create an option that reflects your own beliefs and opinions. You may borrow heavily from one option, or you may combine ideas from two or three options. Or, you may take a new approach altogether. There are, of course, no perfect solutions. And there is no right or wrong answer. Rather, you should strive to craft an option that is logical and persuasive. Be careful of contradictions. For example, you should not sharply reduce immigration if you believe that cultural diversity and fresh ideas are essential to our country’s strength.

In developing your “Option 5,” you should answer the following questions:

How many legal immigrants, including refugees, should the United States admit to the country every year? Explain the basis of your decision.

How should lawmakers decide which applicants for immigration are admitted into the country?

How should the United States deal with the issue of illegal immigration?

What image of the United States does your option project to the rest of the world?

What are the two strongest arguments opposing your option?

What are the two strongest arguments supporting your option?

Name _____

Date _____

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A Nation of Immigrants

My Option 5

Now, imagine that the year is 2050. How will your option have influenced the following topics?

1. The economy:

2. Population and the environment:

3. Foreign policy:

4. Border control:

5. Social service costs:

6. Ethnic relations:

7. Stability in Mexico and Central America: