

LESSON 13

Creating a Welcoming School and Community

A smile is the universal welcome.

~ Max Eastman, *The Sense of Humor* (1921)

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Goal

- » Create a welcoming environment for immigrant students by taking action in the school and community.

Objectives

- » Students will imagine their own reaction to immigrating to a new country and will relate this to the experiences of immigrant children.
- » Students will learn how to evaluate their school from a human rights perspective.
- » Students will design a project for their classroom or school to raise awareness of immigration and build support for immigrant classmates.
- » Students will explore what they can do in their larger community to help welcome and build connections with immigrants.

Essential Question

- » What can you do in your personal life and in your larger community to welcome and support immigrants and other newcomers?

Key Skills

- » Developing creative writing skills (Activity 1).
- » Conducting a survey and analyzing results (Activity 2).
- » Developing a plan for taking collective action to benefit the community (Activity 3).





Materials

- Handout 1: A Creative Short Story*
- Handout 2: Peer Interview*
- Handout 3: How Welcoming is Our School?*
- Handout 4: Ten Steps to Becoming a Human Rights Activist*
- Handout 5: Welcoming Project Ideas*
- Handout 6: Develop a Welcoming Project*
- Handout 7: Criteria for Selection Committee*

Time Frame

5-6 class periods

Vocabulary

-  **advocate**
-  **fictional**
-  **perspective**
-  **welcoming environment**

A New Perspective

Procedure:

1. Brainstorm. Ask students to brainstorm respectful questions that they would like to ask immigrant students in their school about their experiences. Tell the class that these questions should not be directed at any particular student, but rather are hypothetical and could apply even if students do not know any immigrant students themselves. Students who are immigrants themselves should be encouraged to think of questions they may have about the experiences of people from different countries or with different reasons for immigrating.

Write the questions they offer on the board. Next, ask students to brainstorm what kind of questions immigrant students might want to be asked, and write these next to the first set of questions. Finally, write the following questions on the board to supplement the questions that were already brainstormed:

- What is something that someone did for you, as a new immigrant, to help you feel welcome in the United States?
- Do you feel welcome in our school?
- What can we do as members of our school community to make immigrants feel more welcome?

2. Write creatively. Distribute *Handout 1: A Creative Short Story*. Explain to students that they will be writing a creative short story that will be followed by role-play interviews. Their short story will be written in first person, as if they are a modern immigrant or refugee who is now a student at their school. This story should be realistic. Stories should include information about why and how the character came to the United States, their experiences since they arrived, and how they feel as a new student in the school.

The background information for this story can come from what they have learned from previous lessons in *Energy of a Nation*, individual research, or discussions with immigrant friends or acquaintances. Students who are themselves immigrants should write their stories from the perspective of someone from a different country or with different reasons for immigrating.

3. Role-play. After students have written their stories, tell them that they will now take on the role of the immigrant they wrote about for a role-play. Have students form pairs and distribute *Handout 2: Peer Interview*. The students will take turns acting as the character in their story while their partner interviews them.

Ask each student to pick four of the questions that the class developed during the brainstorm session to use during their interview and write them on the handout. In addition to those questions, students will also ask the three questions listed above. Interviews will happen in two rounds. One student will begin as the interviewer, while the other answers the questions from the point of view of their immigrant character. After the interview is over, the students should switch roles. Interviewers should write down their partner's answers on the handout.

4. Reflect. After students have finished the interviews, ask them to write a brief reflection that answers the following questions:

- What experience in your character's story would be the hardest for you to live through?
- How was your partner's story different than yours?
- Will you change the way you think about or treat immigrants because of this exercise?
- How can your school change to be more welcoming for immigrants?

How Welcoming is Our School?

Procedure:

1. Introduce. Explain to students that there are a number of things schools and students can do to create welcoming environments for immigrant students. In the last activity, they imagined what life might be like for an immigrant student at their school. In this activity, they will gather data to try to demonstrate whether their school is welcoming in reality. Gathering data on a situation is a key method of human rights work, and can be used as the basis for planning actions or solutions that address common problems.

2. Form research teams. Have students form groups of three students and give each student a copy of *Handout 3: How Welcoming is Our School?* Each team will try to fill in the answers to each of the questions on the survey. Students can answer some of the questions by drawing on their own knowledge of the school. They may also need to examine the classroom, visit public resource spaces, and if possible, interview key school staff members such as guidance counselors or ELL teachers. The more in-depth the research is, the more accurate their answers will be. If there is not enough time to facilitate student access to different departments and administrators, either offer what you know of school policies or allow students to guess based on their own experiences.

Teacher Tip

If students want to interview fellow students who are immigrants or English language learners, set up a formal interview process with willing volunteers. Otherwise, immigrant students may feel unfairly singled out and uncomfortable if they are approached directly without someone first explaining the project and soliciting their input.

3. Share results. Create a grid on the board with four spaces numbered 1-4 for all of the survey questions. Have small groups offer their scores for each of the questions, tabulating how many groups chose which number score. When everyone has finished sharing their scores, discuss the results as a class.

Questions for Discussion

- ? In what areas is the school doing very well at offering a welcoming environment?
- ? In what areas could the school improve its performance in welcoming immigrant students?
- ? What areas were the most controversial (had the widest variety of scores given)? Why do you think these were so difficult to score?
- ? Can you explain why the school might be having problems in certain areas of being welcoming? Are there common reasons such as limited resources or lack of awareness?
- ? What needs to be done to improve the welcoming environment of your school? What is something easy the school could do? What would make the biggest difference?
- ? Are there any ways that you or your fellow students have contributed to the current environment either positively or negatively?
- ? What could students do differently even if the school does not change its policies?
- ? Were those completing the survey representative of the school's population overall? Would a different group of students have answered this survey differently? What might be some differences in their responses?

Source: Adapted from "Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School" in *This is My Home K-12 Tool Kit*, University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center and Minnesota Department of Human Rights (2005).

Creating a Welcoming Project

Procedure:

1. Introduce. Discuss the importance of taking action in the community through service-learning projects that provide students with real world experiences based on the knowledge they gain in class. Pass out *Handout 4: Ten Steps to Becoming a Human Rights Activist* and go over the general process of becoming involved on an issue you care about. Explain that the class has already spent time understanding immigration from a human rights perspective by doing activities from the curriculum (Steps 1 and 2). In the last activity, students carried out Step 3 and researched the issue in their own school. Now, students will turn to Step 4 and try to decide on a course of action as a class.

2. Brainstorm. Create a mind map on the board around the goal of “Creating a welcoming community for immigrants” (see page 78 for instructions on creating a mind map). Have students suggest different ways communities can be welcoming to immigrants, such as providing important services, demonstrating an interest in other cultures, including immigrants in decision-making processes, and being friendly to newcomers. These “welcoming methods” can be at the government, community, or individual level. Students can refer back to the survey they conducted in the last activity to identify areas where the school could improve, and add those to the mind map.

Once students have generated a list of ways a community can be welcoming, add another level to the mind map that shows class projects students could undertake to improve or support one of the “welcoming methods” already generated. Encourage students to brainstorm projects that can happen on a personal level (saying hello, learning other languages, including newcomers in activities), the school level (holding a school heritage festival, creating a language or cultural exchange), and the community level (helping tutor immigrants in English, collecting donations for refugee families, volunteering at an immigrant service organization). If students are having trouble generating ideas, use *Handout 5: Welcoming Project Ideas* to fill in the mind map.

3. Create project proposals. Split the students into small groups of three or four. Give each student *Handout 6: Develop a Welcoming Project* and *Handout 7: Criteria for Selection Committee*. Groups will be asked to select a welcoming project from the list that the class brainstormed and then develop a written proposal outlining how the class could carry out the project. The project they choose should be a project that is feasible for the whole class to initiate and complete. The goal is for students to engage in service-learning and explore what they can do in their larger community to help welcome and build connections with immigrants.

4. Present. After writing their proposals, each group will present its plan to the class. Before you begin the presentations, ask each group to choose one of its members to be an “Evaluator.” Evaluators will sit on the “Selection Committee” that will evaluate projects and ultimately determine which project should be undertaken by the class. Make sure the Selection Committee has a copy of each group’s proposal and enough copies of *Handout 7: Criteria for Selection Committee* to use one for every proposal. Each group should be given three minutes to present their project. After each presentation, allow time for the entire class to ask questions and offer suggestions. When all of the plans have been presented, ask the Selection Committee to meet for ten minutes to deliberate and choose one plan they think would work best for the class.

5. Implement. Once the Selection Committee has chosen a project, have them announce their selection to the class. Let the students know that it is now their responsibility to implement the proposal developed by the winning group. (If class time will not allow for the implementation stage of this activity, you could also make it an after-school opportunity for extra credit.)

Host a Speaker

Procedure:

1. Survey. Tell students that you are going to invite in a speaker from the community, but would like their input. Have one student lead the class in a large group discussion of what they have learned about creating a welcoming classroom and community. Have another student record the ideas on paper. Then, ask the facilitating student to find out from the class what students would like to know more about, and have the scribe write those ideas down, as well. Collect the notes when the students have finished, and tell students that you will research the opportunities in your community.

2. Invite a speaker. Based on student interest generated by the discussion, do an internet search to find nonprofit service providers who work primarily with immigrants and refugees or educational institutions with programs that focus on immigration. Contact an expert and ask that they come into your class and speak about creating a welcoming community.

3. Host. Have one of the students tell the speaker about the work they have done, and what they have already learned, based on the notes taken during the first phase of this activity. Then, invite the speaker to talk to the group about their field, what organizations in the community do to make it more welcoming, and their ideas on shared responsibility for the integration of immigrants.

4. Debrief. Lead a large group discussion (either with the speaker, or after she or he has departed) about what the students have learned from the speaker.

Questions for Discussion

- ? What is the most interesting thing you learned from the speaker?
- ? What new ideas for welcoming immigrants did you learn about?
- ? What are some community needs that you hadn't previously recognized?
- ? Based on everything you have learned, do you think that your community is welcoming to immigrants and refugees?
- ? Is there anything more you can do to ensure that people who have moved here from other countries have their human rights respected when they arrive?

A CREATIVE SHORT STORY

Students: For this creative writing activity, you will be writing a fictional short story about the experiences of a modern immigrant or refugee student who attends your school. You will put yourself in the shoes of that character and write the piece in the first person. For example, “I had to move away from my home in India when I was 12 years old...” This story should be realistic, meaning that it could potentially be true.

You will need to demonstrate that you understand what it is like to be an immigrant and that you comprehend the American immigration system. The background for your story will come from what you have learned in class, doing individual library and internet research, or through discussions with immigrants that you know. If you moved to the United States yourself, do not use your own story. Rather, create a story of a student from a different country other than your own and write from that perspective.

Below is a basic framework for your paper and questions that you will need to answer. After you write your story, you will be conducting a peer interview and role-playing as the character you wrote about.

Your story about a fictional immigrant student should include the following:

1. What country did you move from, and why?
2. Describe your journey out of your home country and to the United States.
3. How and where did you enter the United States?
4. Did you have legal permission to enter? If so, on what grounds were you eligible? (For example, did you come as a refugee, or did you have a family- or employment-based visa?) If not, is there a way for you to obtain legal immigration status?
5. What were some of your initial impressions of your current school and community?
6. When you first arrived, were students and teachers in your new school welcoming?
7. What are your favorite things about living in your new community or attending your school?
8. What are some of the challenges in your new life, at school and at home?
9. Do you miss your life back in your home country?
10. What are your dreams or goals for the future?



Name: _____

PEER INTERVIEW

Information about the person you are interviewing:

Character Name: _____

Age: _____

Country of Birth: _____

Interview questions and responses (write responses on back side, if necessary)

Question #1: _____

Response:

Question #2: _____

Response:

Question #3: _____

Response:

Question #4: _____

Response:

5. What is something that someone for you, as a new immigrant, to help you feel welcome?

6. Do you feel welcome in our school?

7. What can we do as members of our school community to make immigrants feel more welcome?

HOW WELCOMING IS OUR SCHOOL?

Students: Work in your small groups to research and score your school environment for each of the following questions. These questions are designed to identify how well your school welcomes and supports immigrant students. You can answer some of the questions by drawing on your own knowledge of the school. You may also need to examine the classroom, visit public resource spaces, and if possible, interview key school staff members such as guidance counselors or ELL teachers. Your teacher will help you arrange the necessary interviews. The more in-depth the research is, the more accurate your answers will be.



Rating Scale

1- No/Never

2- Sometimes

3- Often

4- Yes/Always

1. All ELL/immigrant students have equal access to information and support about academic opportunities such as Advanced Placement classes and information about college. **Rating:** _____
2. Members of the school community take necessary action against forms of bullying or discrimination based in differences such as nationality, cultural practices, or citizenship status. **Rating:** _____
3. School administrators require teachers and staff members to participate in trainings and informational sessions about new immigrant populations and their cultural, religious, and other practices in order to ensure a respectful environment. **Rating:** _____
4. Newcomer students and other members of the school community are able to express their beliefs and practices without fear of discrimination. **Rating:** _____
5. The classroom has images, posters, or displays that reflect other languages and cultures. **Rating:** _____
6. The school curriculum includes the voices and stories of immigrant populations past and present. **Rating:** _____
7. The school provides access to school computers and other resources in order to give immigrant and/or low-income student the tools essential to academic success. **Rating:** _____
8. Students who are undocumented are not required to give information that may reveal their immigration status, and their status does not limit their access to schooling. **Rating:** _____
9. School leaders such as teachers, staff, and administrators challenge their own negative assumptions surrounding immigrant populations and encourage students to do the same. **Rating:** _____

HOW WELCOMING IS OUR SCHOOL?

10. The school community requires respectful expression of opinions about immigration and immigrant students within the school community. **Rating:** _____
11. School staff and administration reflect racial, national, and ethnic diversity. **Rating:** _____
12. Teachers convey the material in a variety of ways in order to reach all students regardless of their learning styles or first language. **Rating:** _____
13. ELL/ESL classes are well staffed and promote the integration and equalization of ELL students. **Rating:** _____
14. Social action surrounding immigration and migrant rights is encouraged as well as integrated into school curriculum. **Rating:** _____
15. Immigrant students and non-immigrant students alike are given an opportunity to share their culture and background with others through presentations, food, or art. **Rating:** _____
16. Teachers promote understanding through group learning/partners that break down social boundaries and cliques based in language, nationality, or citizenship status. **Rating:** _____
17. The school community provides important letters, documents, or messages in multiple languages so immigrant students, as well as their parents and guardians, can have an active voice in their education. **Rating:** _____
18. There are institutions and programs in place to ensure that immigrant voices are heard through avenues such as school board meetings, student council meetings, and access to teachers and administrators. **Rating:** _____
19. Services are available either through the school or through referrals to other reputable community service providers to meet immigrant needs in areas such as mental health, healthcare, and legal services. **Rating:** _____
20. I actively promote equality, compassion and learning for all members of the school community regardless of their country of origin or ethnic background. **Rating:** _____

Total Points: _____ / 80 Welcoming Points

Source: Adapted from "Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School" in *This is My Home K-12 Tool Kit*, University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center and Minnesota Department of Human Rights (2005).

TEN STEPS TO BECOMING A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

1. **Choose a human rights issue.** What are the biggest problems you are observing in your community, or that you hear about in the news? Is there a particular issue you feel passionate about? Write out a definition of what you want to address. Deal with just one problem at a time and stay focused.
2. **Identify the related human right(s).** Learn what human rights are connected to your problem. Download a copy of the UDHR at www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/ and choose the human rights most relevant to your issue.
3. **Research the issue.** Get informed about your issue. Read newspapers, magazines, and reports that discuss the problem. Call or write letters to organizations and officials asking for information. Collect statistics. If appropriate, survey your community. Learn what your government is doing to address the issue. Find out what your state or national laws say. Find out who is already taking action on the issue.
4. **Decide on a course of action.** Try to understand the root causes behind the problem. Brainstorm ideas that would help to address those root causes and choose one or two actions that seem the most possible and likely to make the biggest difference. Consider some of the different methods listed in the sidebar.
5. **Organize.** It is often easier to work with other people to achieve your goals. Build a coalition of support. Find other organizations and individuals who are concerned about the problem and agree with your solution. Try to get support from as many different sectors as possible — teachers, officials, students, businesses, community groups. The more people on your team, the more power you will have to make a difference.
6. **Identify your opposition.** Find out who the people and organizations are that oppose your solution. They may not be the "bad guys," but people with different opinions. Consider meeting with your opponents; you might be able to work out a compromise. It is important to try to understand each other's point of view. Always be polite and respectful of other opinions.
7. **Make an action plan.** Make a list of all the steps you need to take to implement your chosen action. Who will do them? When and where will these actions happen? What is the desired result? Will you need to raise money to fund your idea? If possible, practice the action before you carry out your plan.
8. **Advertise.** Let as many people as possible know about the problem you are trying to solve and your proposed solution. Newspapers, radio, and television are usually interested in stories of community action. Some TV and radio stations offer free air time for worthy projects. Write a letter to the editor. The more people who know about what you are doing, the more who may want to support you.
9. **Take action.** Carry out your plan and do not give up if things do not work out exactly as planned. Making change happen takes time. Problem solving means eliminating all the things that do not work until you find something that does.
10. **Evaluate and follow-up.** After you have taken your action, take time to think and talk about what happened. Did you achieve what you wanted to achieve? How do you know? What could you have done better? Try to define some indicators for what progress means. Are some efforts effective and others not? Have you tried everything? Keep thinking creatively about how to solve the problem and decide on what to do next.

Advocacy Methods

Monitor:

Be a human rights witness. Document the problems you see in your community and categorize them as human rights violations.

Mobilize:

Pressure governments and other institutions to stop violations and change policies through protests, letter-writing, and media campaigns.

Educate:

Raise awareness on human rights violations and educate others about our human rights and responsibilities.

Empower:

Build the capacity of others to claim their rights, participate, have their voices heard, and create change.

Change Policies:

Use human rights standards to make recommendations and pressure government officials to change budgets, policies, and laws.

Connect:

Bring together community members, government officials, and other decision-makers to solve human rights problems through collaboration.

Enforce:

Claim rights and bring violators to justice through courts and other mechanisms.

WELCOMING PROJECT IDEAS

Here are possible suggestions for Welcoming Projects to help during the brainstorm:

- Bring people together in a community picnic.



- Make a "Global School Map" showing all the countries where students at your school originated.



- Host a community film screening and discussion about immigration.



- Host an "International Fair" or a "Heritage Fair."



- Set up a Language Exchange between English language learners and English-speakers who want to learn a new language.



- Start an "International Community Garden" with crops grown from around the world.



- Start a neighborhood dinner that brings together newcomers and long-time residents.



- Make welcome bags or baskets for new immigrants and refugees.



- Create a mural to depict what immigration looks like in your community.



- Organize a speakers bureau of immigrant students in your school to talk to classes about their personal experiences and culture.



- Start a school book club exploring immigration-related themes.



- Work with cafeteria staff to create a week or month dedicated to foods from the home countries of immigrant students.



- Volunteer at an immigrant service organization.



- Have welcome signs in a variety of languages around your school.



DEVELOP A WELCOMING PROJECT

Students: As a small group, choose a Welcoming Project that you think is important and can be accomplished by your class. You may choose a project that was developed during the brainstorm session, or a project that your group came up with on your own. Once you have chosen a project, prepare a written proposal that outlines the action or event that your group would like the class to undertake. Write your proposal on a separate sheet of paper. Use your written proposal to prepare a three-minute presentation for the class on the Welcoming Project you want them to consider undertaking. Each written proposal will be reviewed by a peer selection committee and one of the proposals will be chosen for implementation. Answer all of the questions below in as much detail as possible so the selection committee can make an informed decision.

You will need 3 copies of your proposal: one for your teacher, one for the Selection Committee, and one for the group to reference during the presentation.

Outline

I. General Information

1. What is the name of your project?
2. Who are the members of your group?
3. Why did you select this particular project?

II. Project Proposal

1. What is the project?
2. What problem does the project hope to address?
3. What goal or positive impact is the project trying to achieve?
4. Why do you think the class will be motivated to undertake this project?
5. Who will make decisions about the project and make sure actions are carried out?
6. Who needs to be involved? Does the project require input from people outside the classroom?
7. Does the class need to raise money? If so, how will money be raised?
8. When will the project take place? How long will it take to prepare? How long will it take to complete?
9. Where will the project take place?
10. What resources will you need?
11. How will you get those resources?
12. What possible obstacles exist?
13. How will you overcome those obstacles?
14. Provide any other helpful information.

III. Evaluating your Project

1. What do you want to happen as a result of your project?
2. How will you know the project was successful?
3. What will the class learn from doing this project?
4. What criteria will you use to determine the success of your project?

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION COMMITTEE

Each person in the Selection Committee should use the following score sheet to assess all of the proposals. Check the box next to the description that best fits the proposal. A point value is assigned to each of the choices. Total up these points at the end of the score sheet. Use the total values to discuss as a group which of the proposals you think the committee should choose. Keep in mind that the best proposal will be one that the whole class will enjoy doing!

PROJECT NAME:			
UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUE — The proposal demonstrates:			
Thorough understanding of human rights issue and a highly convincing reason for project. (4 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Considerable understanding of human rights issue and an appealing reason for project. (3 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Some understanding of human rights issue and an ambiguous reason for project. (2 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Incomplete understanding of human rights issue with no convincing reason for project. (1 point) <input type="checkbox"/>
CONCEPT — The concept for the project is:			
Creative, compelling, thoroughly outlined, and directly relates to the human rights issue. (4 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Well-outlined, somewhat compelling, and relates to the human rights issue. (3 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Vaguely justified and bears some relation to the human rights issue. (2 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Weak or unjustified, and bears no clear relation to the human rights issue. (1 point) <input type="checkbox"/>
PLANNING — The plan for carrying out the project is:			
Detailed, clearly outlined, highly strategic, and includes evaluation (4 points). <input type="checkbox"/>	Detailed and achievable and includes some evaluation. (3 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Coherent, yet lacking in strategy and includes very little evaluation (2 points). <input type="checkbox"/>	Incoherent and/or unachievable and includes no evaluation (1 point). <input type="checkbox"/>
FEASIBILITY — The project is feasible in terms of cost, time, resources, and student interest:			
Definitely feasible. (4 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Mostly feasible. (3 points) <input type="checkbox"/>	Barely feasible (2 points).. <input type="checkbox"/>	Not feasible. (1 point) <input type="checkbox"/>
POINT TOTAL (Write down total of points scored in box below)			
TOTAL			

Source: This evaluation matrix was adapted from *Cultivating Peace: Taking Action*, Classroom Connections (2004), www.cultivatingpeace.ca, p. 63.