THE POWER OF AUTHENTICITY:
Selecting Authentic Representations of Immigration Stories from Children’s Literature to Enrich Teaching, Learning, & Living

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Overview of Our Time Together

1. Framing Our Talk on Immigration Stories
   - Understanding the sociopolitical context that shapes our interpretations
   - A false dichotomy the creates competing narratives—Good vs. Bad Immigrants
   - What constitutes authentic storytelling & why does it matter?

2. Children’s Literature Examples
   - Books we love & why

3. Implications for Teaching, Learning, & Living
**Immigration & Emigration**

Latin *migrare*

“to move from one place to another”

- Immigration
- Immigrant
- Emigration
- Emigrant
Refugee

- **Refugee**
  - ref·u·gee | \ˌre-fyú-ˈjē , 're-fyú-ˌjē \`
  - **Definition of refugee**
    - : one that flees
    - especially : a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution
• Literal definitions matter less than socially constructed meaning.

• Words are symbolic—Letters form words and words take on meaning when they are used in context.

• The word “immigrant” holds different meanings for different users.

• The stories we share and the language we use to talk about the immigrant experience shapes meaning & interpretation.
  • This is, in part, why AUTHENTICITY matters so much.
  • Who gets to shape the narrative?
Two Competing Immigrant Stories

View image here: Italian family looking for lost baggage, Ellis Island
https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-a95a-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99


Heroic Ellis Island arrival

Illegal invasion
Why is This Important?

Because White supremacy shapes the experience of schooling in the United States & White supremacy privileges this immigrant narrative:

The Ellis Island bootstrap narrative that frames America as the land of opportunity for [white] immigrants.
PEN America categorized the types of stories — themes, characters, topics — that have been banned. Many of the categories overlap.

• **Identities**
  - Titles that deal explicitly with LGBTQ+ topics, or have LGBTQ+ protagonists or prominent secondary characters have been a major target in the current wave of book bans. This is reflected in the Index, with 379 such titles (33%), including a distinct subset of 84 titles that deal with transgender characters and topics (7%).

• Fiction novels and non-fiction books with **protagonists of color** also made up a significant part of banned books in the Index, including 467 titles (41%).

• Books dealing with **Jewish and Muslim characters** and religious/ethnic themes have also been targeted, with 18 titles listed in the Index.
Books About Immigrants that Have Been Challenged or Banned

- W is for Welcome
- Front Desk
- The Book of Unknown Americans
- Ibi Zoboi
- The Arabic Quilt
- American Street
Immigration as a Villain Story
Books Create Opportunities
Where to Begin in Classrooms
Children’s Literature that Enlightens & Expands
(Lesser Known) Biographies
Windows, Mirrors, & Sliding Doors

- The Name Jar by Youngsook Choi
- When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed
- My Two Border Towns by David Bowles, illustrated by Erika Meza
- Islandborn by Jason Diaz
- The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael Lopez
Challenging Assimilationist Views
Remember the Bootstraps?

We often see stories of assimilation celebrated in classrooms. This is harmful to young people’s identity.

The stories of immigration we share in our classrooms should be not defined by how well a person surrenders their cultural and linguistic practices in exchange for English and Whiteness.
What Do We Do in the Classroom?

- Learn American History
- Choose books that are age-appropriate counter narratives
- Use those counter narratives to teach
  - skills and strategies
  - standards aligned curriculum
- Engage in the rich discussions that come out of these books
- Value oral stories as counter narratives
- Engage with and promote diverse linguistic and cultural practices
Stay in Touch

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