

Why Are We Here? Immigrating to Charlotte from Around the World

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Introduction

My students come in every morning, excited to be at school and to learn. They unpack their backpacks, hand in their folders and sit down to either eat breakfast or to work in their morning journals. They sit at tables with Latinos, White, African American and Asian students. They can see that they have different skin colors, but that does not stop them from being friends. In fact, they never even ask me why they are different. At the age of five or six they just accept it. They are all kids who come to school to learn and have fun. I enjoy watching them work together and play together with no thought about skin color or from where their parents originated. I do though hear from upper grade teachers about how they overhear their students talking about racial differences and picking on other students because of it. As students get older, their perception of each other changes. I know that as they get older, they are more aware of their surroundings and absorb stereotypes and start emulating what they see. Right now, however, my students are enjoying just being kids and having someone to have fun with and talk to.

Just looking around my class, I am in awe. Where I grew up outside of Buffalo, New York, there were very few, if at all, foreign born students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2010-2011 school year, there were only 20 students out of 498 who did not identify as 'white'. All of my schools (elementary, middle and high schools) were predominately white with very few African-American students within the whole district. There were no stories about hardships in coming to America or any fears of being deported due to status. The only person that I knew of who came to America as an immigrant was my grandmother, who came from Germany when she married my grandfather. I was never aware of any struggle to come to America to start a new life, nor did I have a chance to learn another culture or language from my peers. On the other hand, I did not grow up around people who perpetuated stereotypes. I grew up accepting of people regardless of where you came from since there were few opportunities to be around people who stereotyped others due to skin color or cultural background.

Background

I teach Kindergarten at Albemarle Road Elementary School in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system (CMS). We are a Title-1, Pre-K through 5th grade school with approximately 1200 students. Of those 1200 students, 96% qualify for free and reduced meals. Our population is very diverse, with approximately 44% Hispanic, 42%

African American, 5% White and 8% Asian. Also, approximately half of the 1200 students are limited English proficient, which means that they speak another language in the home. Spanish is the language that is predominately spoken, but there are many other languages that can be found in my school. We also have a growing refugee population where we have been getting students from strife-affected areas such as the Sudan, Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and El Salvador, as of 2011.

Objectives

I have two goals in mind for my curriculum unit. The first goal that I have is to instill in my students a level of cultural awareness about themselves and others. I want my students to be aware of people's backgrounds, and recognize that those backgrounds may not be what they believe them to be. I want my students to be aware of the reasons why we have all come to North Carolina, and to Charlotte, in particular. I feel that this is important because our families have, for any reason, decided to make Charlotte home. We live in these neighborhoods that have a mix of nationalities and we need to have a factual understanding of each other, not just perpetuating perceptions.

My second goal for my unit is to make the parents feel more comfortable with the school setting. I want to make my school, or at least my classroom, the place where they feel safe, regardless of immigration status. I want the parents to know that we accept their backgrounds and their cultural differences and want them to share with us things they may have done or seen from their home countries. I want them to know that they are welcome to participate in all school events, regardless of immigration status. I also understand that many of them work odd hours, but if they are available, I don't want them to feel unwelcome and believe that they can't come to the school due to immigration status. Since some parents are afraid to come to the school, it makes it harder for me, as the teacher, to help meet my students' needs. Since I can't get them in, it makes it even harder for me to get a translator to have a phone conference and answer their questions without meeting face-to-face.

This unit will cover many of the Kindergarten Common Core Language Arts standards as well as some of the North Carolina Essential Social Studies standards. They are as follows:

K.RIT.1 – With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

K.RIT.2 – With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.

K.RIT.3 – With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

K.RIT.4 – With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

K.RIT.5 – Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book.

K.RIT.6 – Name the author and illustrator of a text and define the role of each in presenting the ideas or information in a text.

K.RIT.7 – With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g. what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts)

K.RIT.8 – With prompting and support, identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.

K.RIT.9 – With prompting and support, identify the basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g. in illustrations, descriptions, procedures).

K.RIT.10 – Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

K.W.1 – Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book.

K.W.3 – use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

K.SL.1 – Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

K.SL.2 – Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

K.SL.6 – Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

K.G.1.1 – Use maps to locate places in the classroom, school, and home

K.G.1.2 – Use globes and maps to locate land and water features.

K.E.1.1 – Explain how families have needs and wants.

K.C.1.1 – Explain similarities in self and others.

K.C.1.2 – Explain the elements of culture (how people speak, how people dress, foods they eat, etc.)

Rationale

The trends of immigration have been changing for the past thirty years. At the beginning of the twentieth century, immigration was primarily from European countries and settlement was concentrated in traditional immigrant cities, such as New York and Chicago. Following the Nationality Amendments of 1965, there were no longer any national origin quotas, opening up the ability to emigrate from areas other than Europe. Immigrant numbers have continued to increase but patterns of settlement have changed. Indeed, in recent years the “largest percentage growth in foreign-born population took place in the Midwestern and southern states, with North Carolina experiencing the greatest increase at 273.7%”.¹ Not only are the numbers increasing, but the “source countries have shifted from Europe in the first three quarters of the century to Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa in the last quarter”.² These new immigrants are being pulled to these new gateways by the opportunities that are available for them, especially where there “is a high demand for low-wage labor”.³ Charlotte, in the 1990’s, was beginning to expand and become a banking center which caused an explosion of construction. With all of this construction, Charlotte had a need for workers that was met by incoming Latinos willing to work in construction and other industries associated with urban growth.

Since Charlotte has become an emerging gateway city for immigrants, where are immigrants located within Charlotte? Traditionally, immigrants have settled into “clustered, tight-packed inner-city neighborhoods, often denoted as Little Italy, Chinatown, or the like.”⁴ Nowadays, immigrants are settling into the suburbs “upon their initial arrival in the United States”⁵, where they can still access things like buses and shopping just as well as they could have in the traditional inner-city. These new suburban settlement areas are very evident around Charlotte. The east side, around the Central Avenue corridor, is near to where my school, Albemarle Road Elementary, is located. The school’s population, which is very mixed by White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian just shows how the area has become inter-mixed, and increasingly less homogenized.

Children are not born prejudiced, but do begin to see differences among each other at around ages 4-5⁶. Many children are beginning to form their own opinions and usually model themselves after the adults they are around, since that is what they see. Due to so many “cognitive, developmental and social changes that take place in children’s lives during their early years, attitudes toward one’s own and other racial and ethnic groups

may change from early to middle childhood”.⁷ My goal is to give my students the information that they need in order to make their own decisions and not rely on what other people say or think, whether it is true or not.

Strategies

Socratic Seminar

Socratic Seminar, as defined, is “a collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about a text”.⁸ The teacher, since they are in Kindergarten, will act as a facilitator to their discussion, guiding their learning by asking open-ended questions. If the students ask you a question, answer them back by asking a question of your own. Have a list of open-ended questions prepared ahead of time based on the reading so that you can help your students start their conversation (with Kindergarteners, this is very important as sometimes they do not know how to begin a conversation connected to a text).

In order to have these deep conversations, it is necessary to have some procedures in place so that everyone gets a chance to share their information. The first procedure I have is to have all my students come to the carpet and sit in our ‘sharing circle’. The sharing circle is when they come to the carpet and sit on a letter (the letters run around the outside edge of the carpet) where they are facing the middle. There are three sides that the students are allowed to sit on because the last side is where I sit so that I can guide the conversation.

Conversation is the most important part of the Socratic Seminar, so there must be steps put into place to ensure that there is a conversation, not just people shouting out. In my class we will utilize the ‘Share Bear’. When a student has the ‘Share Bear’, they are the only one who may share their thoughts, feelings, ideas. In order to get a turn with ‘Share Bear’, the students must listen to each other and raise their hand only when the first child has finished speaking. That child will then pass the ‘Share Bear’ on to the next student. Once the students get the hang of waiting for their turn to talk, the ‘Share Bear’ can be either kept or phased out. Also remind your students to respect each other; there are no bad ideas or thoughts.

Read-Alouds

“At all grade levels, students need to listen to age-appropriate texts in a variety of genres and increasingly complex texts within those genres”.⁹ The teacher will model strategies that students need to use in order to understand book and print awareness skills. Teachers who utilize read-alouds will build strategies that can be used while reading a text. These include book and print awareness skills, using phonics to decode words, sight word recognition, and building vocabulary. It also gives the students a chance to see how the

teacher uses those strategies as he/she reads by modeling asking yourself questions such as ‘I wonder what she is doing?’ or ‘I don’t know this word, but I can see from the picture that it could mean this’.

As with the Socratic Seminar, it is necessary to allow the students a chance to talk about the book, not only as a large group, but in smaller groups as well. During the whole group discussion of the read-aloud, allow the students to ‘turn and talk’ with their neighbors. This allows the students “opportunities to engage in more talk than would be possible in a whole-group discussion”.¹⁰ By including these activities into your read-aloud, your discussions become more worthwhile as more children are participating and having a chance to share their thoughts and ideas.

Journals

Journals give students a chance to process their thoughts about what they have read or what they have discussed. After a Socratic Seminar where a lot of material is covered, it gives the student a chance to process that information and pick the piece that sticks out to them and that they may want to focus on or remember. “Through writing – and drawing as well – readers can express and expand their thinking and improve their ability to reflect on a text”.¹¹ The teacher then can assess how well the student understood the text and guide their lesson for the following day to help them understand the topic.

Technology

Technology abounds in nearly every aspect of life nowadays from personal computers, cell phones to iPads or other tablets. With all of this technology around, it is necessary to incorporate it into the classroom to help students learn. I have a Smartboard in my classroom that I will utilize to help my students gain a better understanding of the countries and areas around the world about which we will be talking. The students will use interactive Smartboard lessons to manipulate maps and countries, giving them an opportunity to work with maps and a sense of how maps work. The second way I will use my Smartboard is to create PowerPoint lessons of pictures of the countries that are covered through this unit. Students will gain a better understanding of the topics if they are given a chance to experience places and things “first hand”, through pictures and videos, rather than just by hearing or reading about it.

Activities

The activities for these lessons are very repetitive; they only change to go along with the topic of the day. For example, PowerPoint presentations will be utilized, but the content will be changed in order to fit the day’s topic.

Before I begin teaching these lessons, I will write a note home to the parents of my students letting them know that we are going to be talking about immigration and that I would like their input throughout the week. I will be asking them their country of origin so that we can map where we came from and where we all settled (Charlotte). If the parents would like to come in on the day we will be talking about their country and would like to share something (food, clothing, language, etc...), they will be welcomed to do so. I will also let them know that at the end of the unit we will be having a big celebration to celebrate all of our cultures and that they are encouraged to attend.

Lesson One: Introduction

I will begin my lesson by having my students come to the carpet. I usually dismiss my students to the carpet by the table number that they sit at. We will then introduce the topic of immigration with a discussion of countries that people came from. I would begin by telling my students that my family is originally from Germany and Italy and that they came to this country for better opportunities to live (jobs, homes, etc...); but that they could have come for other reasons such as war. We would then turn the discussion to where their families came from. The discussion may have to be guided from talking about states to other countries as well as talking about why their families decided to come to America, if they know. I will then write down the countries that are brought up so that we can make sure that we talk about each country that is represented by the students in my class.

Next, I will pull up a world map up on the SmartBoard so that we can see where the countries are located in relation to North Carolina. We will then talk about the different ways people can physically get to the United States, by train, by bus, by airplane, or by boat. Some kids may even remember coming to America by one of these ways and may want to contribute their own personal experiences to our discussion. We will then post another map on a bulletin board that we can look at throughout the day and week. The map will depict where my students' families originated from. Then we will connect all the students to Charlotte using string to show where we all are today.

We will then read the story, *My Shoes and I* by Rene Colato Lainez. We will begin by looking at the cover and making predictions about what they think the story will be about. After we look at the cover and make some predictions, we will take a picture walk through the book and continue to predict what the story will be about. As the students are making their predictions, I am recording them on the SmartBoard so that they can check after we read to see if they were right. At the same time I stress to the children that predictions do not have to be right, since they are only guessing what the story will be about. Then we will read the story about the boy who travels with his father to America to join his mother, who sent him a new pair of shoes for the journey.

After reading the story, I want the students to reflect on what happened in the story. They will write and illustrate a short story (two to three sentences) in their journal about how they would feel going on such a long journey. Some kids may have made a journey like that and will be thinking about their own experiences. After they have written, I will have them all come together on the carpet to share their thoughts and feelings.

Lesson Two: Latin America Day

We will begin this day with coming to the carpet for a review of what had been discussed and read the previous day. I will then go to the map that is on the wall and show the students that today we will be discussing the Latin American countries and some reasons why the people who live there may want to leave their country and come to America to begin a new life. I will have taken pictures of all my students and we will post the pictures of the students who identify as coming from those countries.

We will then dismiss back to our seats to create a passport that we will take on all our 'travels' around the world for the week. Inside the passport will be pictures of the countries that we will be focusing on during each lesson throughout the week.

Our next step in our travels will be to watch a PowerPoint presentation that I have created with pictures and video clips of places from the countries we will be talking about. Since we cannot actually travel to those countries, I still want to expose my students to them through the Smart Board. I will then facilitate a discussion about what we see in those pictures or video clips. I want my students to be able to compare what they see on the PowerPoint to what they have or know here in Charlotte. Do they dress the same? Does the weather look like it is the same? We will create a chart to keep track of our findings so that we can compare all of the information that we find about all the countries at the end of our unit.

After we finish with the PowerPoint and our chart, we will read *La Mariposa* by Francisco Jimenez. This story talks about a little boy who is in first grade but cannot communicate with anyone since he only speaks Spanish. I believe this would spark a great conversation with my students since half of my students speak another language and they have learned English as a second language. I would like to hear my students discuss how they felt not understanding what I or other students said to them until they learned more English. I would like to ask them at what point did they feel comfortable talking with other people. Even those students who only speak English can benefit from this discussion because they can see from the story as well as from their friends what it feels like to not be able to understand the people around you. The students will then be

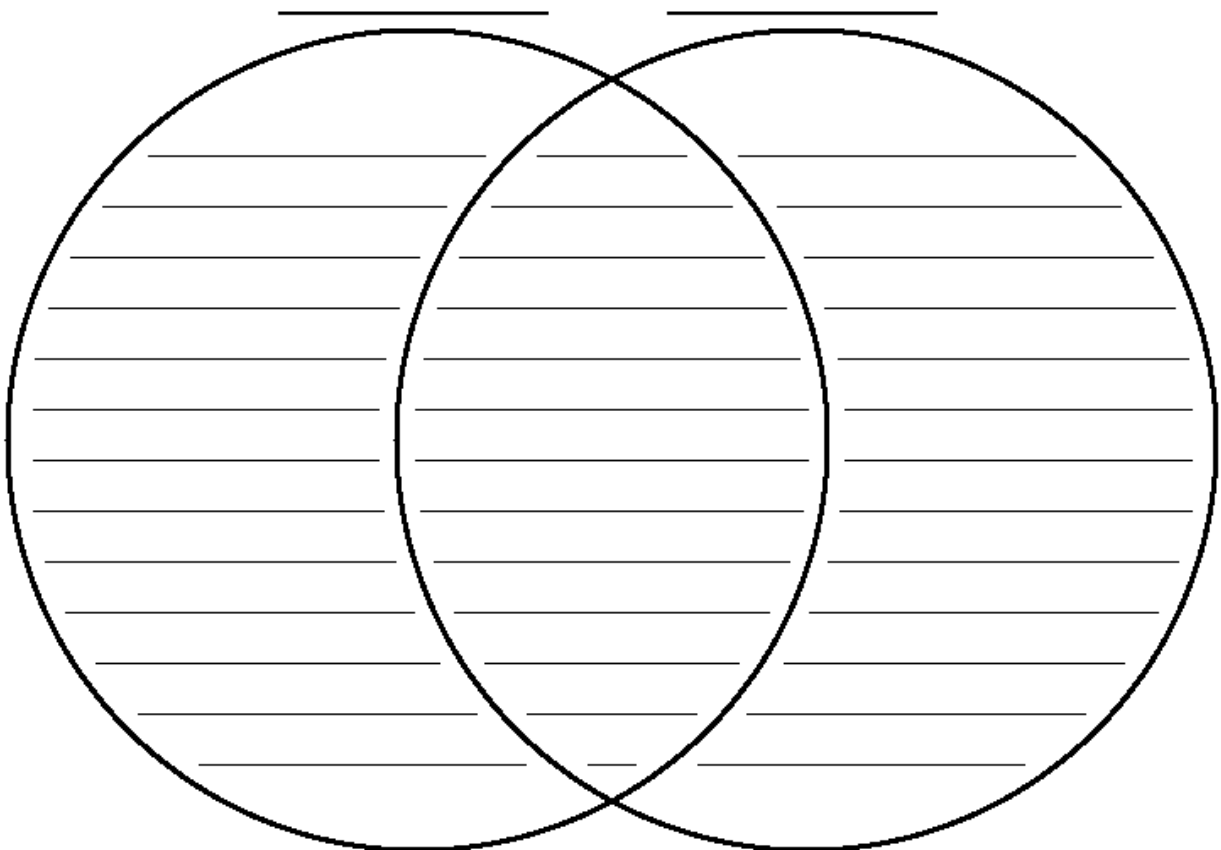
dismissed back to their seats to create another entry in their journal about how they feel (or would feel) not being able to communicate with the people you see every day.

Lesson Three: Africa Day

We will begin today's lesson like we did previously. We will begin by briefly discussing what we had learned about where people come from and how it feels to be in a new country. We will then go to the map and show the students that today we will be discussing African countries and some reasons why the people who live there may want to leave and come to America to begin a new life. We will then post pictures of the students whose families say they have come from African countries and compare how far it took for them to travel to Charlotte as it did for those families who have traveled from Latin America. We will then dismiss back to our seats to add to our passport the countries that we will be discussing today.

We will then watch the PowerPoint presentation that I have created with pictures and video clips of places from the African countries we will be talking about. We will then have a conversation about what we notice from those pictures and then I will have my students predict some reasons why they think people would have left those African countries to come to Charlotte. We will add to our chart our thoughts and feelings that

Name : _____ **Venn Diagram**



we have about what we have seen.

After the PowerPoint presentation and our chart, we will read *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* by Mary Williams. This story talks about a boy who gets together with a large group of boys to flee the fighting in Sudan and their trials and tribulations to get to America. I want my students to be thinking about how it would feel to be forced from their home without their parents or siblings. I want them to consider how it would feel to need to leave because there was nothing left in their village. How would they feel? What would they do? Would they be strong enough to walk to another country to get away from the fighting? The students will then be dismissed back to their seats to create another entry into their journal about how they would feel if they lived in a place where there was constantly fighting and lives being lost all around them.

Lesson Four: Southeast Asia Day

Today's lesson will begin like we did on the previous days. We will begin by briefly discussing what we had learned about where people come from and how it feels to be in a new country. We will go to the map and show the students that today we will be discussing Southeast Asian countries and some reasons why the people who live there may want to leave come to America to begin a new life. We will then post pictures of the students whose families say they have come from Southeast Asian countries and compare how far it took for them to travel to Charlotte as it did for those families who have traveled from Latin America and Africa. We will then dismiss back to our seats to add to our passport the countries that we will be discussing today.

We will turn again to a PowerPoint presentation that I have created that contains pictures and video clips of Southeast Asia, in particular, the countries we will be focusing on. We will discuss what we see and compare that to what we have previously discussed (Latin America, Africa and around Charlotte) and see what is the same and what is different between all the different countries. We will record our findings on our reference chart.

After the PowerPoint presentation and our chart, we will read *The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story* by Pegi Deitz Shea. This story is of a little girl in a refugee camp, watching her grandmother make colorful story cloths. She wants to make one, but doesn't know a story she could tell until she reflects on her own journey and what she looks forward to that she is able to create her story cloth. This is where I want my students to reflect on their own stories, or ones that their parents have told them. If students are not comfortable sharing their stories, I will not force them to share. If they do, we will discuss what they had been told of their journey or what they encountered on their journey on their way to Charlotte, North Carolina.

To wrap our lesson, we will create our own story cloth on construction paper. Each student has a story (their own, their parents, or one they heard) that they could illustrate on a piece of construction paper. After they have created their square, we will come to the carpet to tell our stories. After all the students have shared, we will then 'stitch' our quilt together to hang up in the corner of our classroom for everyone to see.

Lesson 5: Celebration Day!

On our final day we will have a celebration of all that we had learned and experienced throughout the week. I will invite the International Club of a nearby high school to help us celebrate. In order to celebrate, I will have set up 4 stations around the room that will be manned by International Club students, giving my students the chance to interact with the older students as well as getting a firsthand chance at experiencing a different culture.

Station One: Games!

I will have three different games set up that my students can play that are from the countries that we have talked about. The purpose of these games is to allow my students to pretend that they are children in that country and to have fun. Students will play the games that are commonly found in or around the regions and countries we have explored in class. The first game is Cinco Marias, played like Jacks, from Latin America. The second game is Mbube, Mbube from Africa and the last game is Chinlon from Myanmar.

Station Two: Arts and Crafts

Also set up will be an arts and crafts corner where the students will be able to create a piece of artwork that relates to one of the regions we have discussed. The different types of artwork that will be created are paper plate maracas (Latin America), Khamsas (Africa), and kites (Southeast Asia).

Station Three: Music/Dance

This last station will give my students a chance to listen to music that is popular in each region. I feel that it is important to give my students a chance to listen to another culture's music and to see how they incorporate it into their lives. [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) will be used during this time giving the students a chance to see as well as hear different languages.

As with all of the stations, I will invite the parents to share with us some games, art or music and dance with us as they would know better than I what is traditionally done in their countries. They will also be invited to join us to help teach us the games and songs and dances if they would like. They will also be invited to share with the whole school during our International Night if they choose to do so.

International Night

International night will be held after school where the whole school and all the parents and families can be involved. This gives the whole school a chance to celebrate their heritage as well as teaching other adults and students about a different culture. In order to be prepared, I will need to send home a flyer to parents asking for volunteers who would like to come in and share an aspect of their culture with our students.

Hello Parents!

We are going to have an International Festival and we are looking for volunteers who would like to help us with cultural games, crafts, food dishes, and/or fashion show. Please let us know which category you would like to help with as well as an idea of what is popular from your home country so that we may celebrate us all!

Thank you for your help!

_____ I would like to help with games.

Game: _____

_____ I would like to help with Arts and Crafts.

Craft: _____

_____ I would like to donate a dish that is popular from my country.

Dish: _____

_____ I would like to participate in the Multicultural Fashion Show.

Country: _____

Child's Name: _____

Parent's Name: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

This event gives our whole school a chance to get together to celebrate our differences as well as get to know what makes us all unique. It also gives the parents a chance to interact with teachers outside of the classroom setting and assure them that we, as teachers, appreciate the cultural differences that make our school a unique place to be.

Student Resources

Laiñez, René, and Fabricio Broeck. *My shoes and I*. Honesdale, Pa.: Boyds Mills Press, 2010.

This story is about a little boy who travels with his father to the United States to reunite with his mother, who sent him new shoes for his journey.

Jimeñez, Francisco, and Simon Silva. *La mariposa*. Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

This is a story about a little boy who has trouble communicating with the other students in his class, but becomes fascinated by a caterpillar, which helps him to be understood by the other students.

Williams, Mary, and R. Gregory Christie. *Brothers in hope: the story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2005.

This story is about a little boy who unites with other boys to escape the war that is ravaging their villages.

Shea, Pegi Deitz, and Anita Riggio. *The whispering cloth: a refugee's story*. Honesdale, Pa.: Caroline House, Boyds Mills Press ;, 1995.

This story is about a little girl who lives in a refugee camp who wants to make a pa'ndau, like her grandmother, but cannot figure out what story to tell until she confronts her past.

Materials for Classroom Use:

- Maps for classroom wall as well as the Smartboard
- Venn Diagram to compare the countries discussed
- PowerPoint presentations to go along with all of the countries
- Games to go along with each country
- Arts and Crafts to go along with each country
- Music to go along with each country

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<http://www.historysouth.org/saladbowl.html> (accessed November 25, 2012).

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<http://ehis.ebscohost.com.librarylink.uncc.edu/eds/detail?sid=fa74bf1d-96bf-422d-a6e3-ff9c64a76547%40sessionmgr11&vid=2&hid=1> (accessed November 1, 2012).

Waters, Mary C., and Tomas R. Jimenez. "Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: New Empirical and Theoretical Challenges." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 105-25.

Websites:

<http://www.bhsu.edu/Portals/312/Africa.pdf>

Resources on games, crafts and songs from Africa

http://www.naturedream-travel.com/culture_chinlon.htm

How to play Chinlon from Myanmar

http://www.topics-mag.com/edition27/mexican_games/canicas.html

How to play canicas (marbles) from Mexico

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/mexico/maracas/>

How to make a maraca

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVy4Vya0O_M

This is a link to a Chinese Children's song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeQUyyj2Sc8>

This is a link to a children's song from Myanmar.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/BiLingoKidz>

This is a link to children's songs from Mexico

<http://www.nwabr.org/education/pdfs/PRIMER/PrimerPieces/SocSem.pdf>

This is a link to some good information about Socratic Seminars.

<http://www.esiponline.org/classroom/foundations/reading/readalouds.html>

This is a link that provides good information about read-alouds.

http://www.math-aids.com/Venn_Diagram/

This is a link to Venn Diagram worksheets that can be printed out for your students.