

# Additional Information for Teachers: Teaching about Immigrant Experiences and Overview of Sources

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## Part I: Teaching about Immigrant Experiences

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Teaching about immigration requires intentionality and sensitivity. Remind students that conversations about immigration will raise issues related to power and identity, which can be emotional. As you discuss these issues with your class, remind students that it is important to be respectful of the experiences of others, to think before they speak, and to be prepared to support their statements with facts.

We encourage teachers to carefully consider the dynamics of their classrooms as they prepare to use the primary sources at the center of this lesson. This lesson might be especially intense for students with a personal connection to immigration. For example, students who are newcomers or the children of immigrants may experience this lesson in unique ways, particularly if they or their loved ones are undocumented. Students with different racial, ethnic, or religious identities may also experience this lesson differently. Students with different political views may offer contrasting perspectives. Discussions can take unexpected turns. Students may unwittingly offend each other. The process of exploring unequal power dynamics can lead students to lash out in anger or to suffer in silence. Teachers need to be aware of these possibilities and act to make their classrooms a safe place for all students. While we cannot offer a formula for dealing with all situations, being prepared for many possible outcomes will go a long way to helping students consider these critical issues. You may wish to reference the Choices Program's "[Teaching about Controversial Issues: A Resource Guide](#)" for additional guidance.

Be sure to preview the sources to make sure they are appropriate for your classroom. While the sources range in tone and content, some deal with emotional subject matter that could elicit emotional responses (such as Sources 2 and 8). Below are overviews of each of the twelve sources. These summaries are adapted from the introductions your students will see on their handouts for each source, in addition to some other relevant notes.

## Part II: Overview of Sources

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### SOURCE 1: Adela

Adela grew up in Arroyo Seco, a small town in the Mexican state of Michoacán. In her mid-twenties, she left her low-paying job as a housekeeper to journey with her husband and six-week-old newborn daughter, Estrella, across the U.S.-Mexico border without legal immigration documentation. Adela eventually settled in Modesto, California, where she became a leader in the local immigrant rights movement in 2006. About a year later, Adela was interviewed at age forty-five. The interview was first published in 2008.

### SOURCE 2: Adrián Cruz

Adrián Cruz grew up in a neighborhood in Guatemala City, Guatemala, known for gang activity. His mother was murdered in front of him at age five, which Adrián briefly discusses in the source. At seventeen, he was severely injured by a gang member and fled gang retribution. He left Guatemala in 2012 and twice made the dangerous journey to the U.S.-Mexico border. Detained after his second attempt to cross the border, he spent months in ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] detention in California before being released on bail in 2015. Adrián was interviewed shortly after his release in 2016. As of the interview's publication in 2019, Adrián was still awaiting a decision from the immigration court on his asylum application.

### **SOURCE 3: Siti Dyannie Rahmaputri (“Putri”)**

Siti Dyannie Rahmaputri—“Putri”—was born in 1993 to a middle-class family in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her father worked as a banker and her mother held a college degree. When Putri was eleven, her parents decided to travel to the United States on temporary visas in search of educational opportunities for their only child. Their application for permanent residency status was rejected, making her family “undocumented.” Her parents worked under-the-table jobs in dry cleaners, gas stations, and other small businesses. Putri later received DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status, completed community college, started a degree in neurobiology at UC Berkeley, and began advocating for immigrant rights. Her story was published in 2013.

### **SOURCE 4: Mazin Sidahmed**

Mazin Sidahmed is a Sudanese-born, United Kingdom-raised, New York-based journalist who started his career at *The Daily Star* in Lebanon in 2014. He was eighteen months old when his family fled from Sudan. He is the co-founder of *Documented*, a nonprofit news site that covers immigration in the New York area. Mazin shared the story about his transnational family’s WhatsApp group on stage in New York City as part of a project celebrating immigration and later contributed this piece to a book published in 2021.

### **SOURCE 5: Heraclio Astete**

Heraclio Astete grew up on a farm in a mountain village in Peru. He studied education at university in Lima, and later opened a school in his village before experiencing hardship during Peru’s political unrest in the 1980s. In 1991, he came to the United States on a H-2A visa as a temporary guest worker, herding sheep in Idaho and California. After contracting a debilitating illness related to his work, he organized a herder’s union and successfully advocated for the improvement of guest workers’ conditions in California. Heraclio was interviewed in 2016 at age sixty-two. This interview was published in 2017.

### **SOURCE 6: Tatenda Ngwaru**

Tatenda Ngwaru was born in Zimbabwe and migrated to the United States in 2016. She is an intersex advocate and the founder of True Identity, the first organization for intersex people in Zimbabwe. A 2019 documentary, *She’s Not a Boy*, follows her life as an intersex woman living in New York City. Tatenda shared her story on stage in New York City as part of a project celebrating immigration and later contributed this piece to a book published in 2021.

### **SOURCE 7: Fausto Sanchez**

Fausto Sanchez was born in 1969 in Oaxaca, Mexico, and came to the United States as a teenager in the 1980s to work in the fields in southern California. A Mixteco (an Indigenous group native to Mexico), Fausto speaks two Mixteco dialects as well as Spanish and English. He used his language proficiency to translate and advocate for Indigenous farmworkers in the United States. He was interviewed in 2016 at age forty-seven in Arvin, California, where he lives with his wife. This interview was published in 2017.

### **SOURCE 8: Samad**

Samad grew up in Iraq and came to the United States as a refugee of the Gulf War (1990-1991). In his twenties, he was offered asylum in the United States after working for the U.S. military during its operations in Iraq. Samad has experienced significant memory loss, and it is difficult to determine if this results from trauma, mental illness, or medical issues—or the realities of all three. This source includes a brief mention of suicide.

The passage is a narrative excerpt co-produced by scholar Nora J. Kenworthy in close collaboration with Samad (a pseudonym), who at the time was a patient of a northeastern state psychiatric facility. In addition to consulting medical records and speaking with staff, Kenworthy conducted in-depth interviews with patients at

the hospital. Following the interview, Samad collaborated in revising and expanding the narrative. For legal and ethical reasons, Kenworthy did not publish the name of the facility and used a pseudonym for the narrative—a practice common in historical or ethnographic work on mental hospitals and institutionalization. The narrative was published in 2016.

Samad's experiences demonstrate the complex and rarely discussed interwoven bureaucracies of immigration law and psychiatric institutionalization. While conversations about both systems often rely on demographic data, statistics, and broad patterns of social structures, Samad's story allows students to engage with the questions involved at the level they are experienced by individual human beings facing paradoxical constraints and making difficult choices.

### **SOURCE 9: Carolina Alvarado Molk**

Carolina Alvarado Molk was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Brooklyn, New York, where her family settled in 1995. She earned a dual bachelor's in English and religion from Brooklyn College (CUNY) in 2008 and a PhD in English from Princeton University in 2017. She lives and writes in Denver, Colorado. Carolina contributed this essay, "On Paper," to a 2022 collection of stories, poems, and artwork by undocumented and formerly undocumented immigrants to the United States.

### **SOURCE 10: Saba Nafees**

Saba Nafees was born in Lahore, Pakistan, before immigrating to the United States with her family in 2004 when she was eleven years old. Saba's grandparents, already U.S. residents, sponsored her and her parents for a green card (permanent resident status). However, before the green card process was completed Saba's grandparents died, which meant Saba and her parents' immigration status changed to "undocumented." Saba later received DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status, earned a PhD at Texas Tech University, and became both a computational biologist and advocate for immigrant rights. She wrote this piece in 2015.

### **SOURCE 11: New Latthivongskorn**

New Latthivongskorn was born in Bangkok, Thailand, to a middle-class family. When the Thai economy crashed in the mid-1990s, his family struggled. After years of trying to stay in Thailand, New's parents decided to move to the United States to better support their three children. New joined his parents in California at nine years old. Without legal immigration documentation, he and his family were "undocumented." While a college student at UC Berkeley, New became involved in the immigrant rights movement. He testified before the California state legislature and U.S. Supreme Court (2019) on behalf of undocumented young people. He received DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status and graduated as the first undocumented student from UC San Francisco's medical school. His story was published in 2015.

### **SOURCE 12: Laila Lalami**

Laila Lalami was born in Rabat, Morocco, in 1968 to a working-class family. After studying in Morocco and the United Kingdom, Laila traveled to the United States in 1992 on a student visa to begin a PhD in linguistics. Now a U.S. citizen, Laila is a novelist, essayist, and professor at UC Riverside in California. Her story, published in the *New York Times* in 2020, is adapted from her nonfiction book, *Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America*.