

## For Primary School Students

### [One Green Apple](#)

By Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ted Lewin. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. 32 pages.  
Grades 1-4

Farah, a young Muslim girl, begins her story on her second day in a new school in a new country. She listens and nods but doesn't speak. So many things are strange to her, including the cloths and language. Her class is going on a field trip to an apple orchard where they will each pick an apple to be made into cider. When she puts a green apple into the cider press instead of a ripe red, one as her classmates have done, they symbolically protest. But the cider from all the apples they have mixed together is a beautiful metaphor for the benefits of intermingling different people. Farah begins to make friends. She even learns a new word "App-ell." Her simple story helps us understand the feelings of one of the many immigrant children striving to make their way on our American world. Tee Lewin's gorgeous full-page watercolors depict the apple picking adventure. This is a great picture book for early primary and ESL classrooms.

### [The Name Jar](#)

Written and illustrated by Yangsook Choi. Dell Dragonfly Books, 2001. 40 pages.  
Grades K-3

Clutching the small wooden block with the characters of her Korean name carved into it, Unhei worries about being accepted and fitting in at her new school and new country. When she finds that the children have difficulty pronouncing her name, she decides to pick a new American name. Sensing her difficulty in choosing a name, Unhei's classmates create a name jar with suggestions for her. Finally, with the help of a new friend, she not only chooses a name that reflects her heritage and culture but also inspires her classmates to better understand cultural differences and similarities.

Yangsook Choi's charming story and illustrations explore issues of assimilation and cultural duality faced by immigrant children and their American classmates. It could well serve as the basis for classroom discussions of these issues and would be a welcome addition to class libraries.

### [Miss Bridie Choose a Shovel](#)

By Leslie Connor, illustrated by Mary Azarian. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.  
Grades K-3

Upon embarking on her voyage to America in 1856, Miss Bridie chose a shovel to help carve a new life in a new land. Told in simple lyrical language, Leslie Connor's story of one young Irish woman's journey symbolizes the contribution made by millions of immigrants in building our nation.

Illustrated with colorful woodcuts by Caldecott medalist Mary Azarian, Miss Bridie

Chose a Shovel offers the opportunity to engage very young students in an exploration of the themes of immigration, history and social values.

### [How People Migrate](#)

By Sarah De Capua. True Book Series, Scholastic, 2004. 46 pages.  
Grades 2-4

This up-to-date, matter-of-fact explanation of the immigration process in the United States defines the obvious (“What is immigration?”) while adding only a few details such as the Diversity Visa Lottery. Current color photographs, including those of Rwandan refugees, Homeland Security border patrols and Indian immigrants posing in front of a New Jersey Sikh temple, add authenticity to a quick read. This is an inexpensive, introductory book on contemporary immigration issues evidently designed for the emerging readers and/or ESL students.

### [Sparrow Jack](#)

By Mordicai Gerstein. Frances Foster Books, 2003. 32 pages.  
Grades 1-4

This picture book is based on a true story and it is truly a must have in the elementary classroom. A whimsical tale of a perseverant immigrant who saves Philadelphia by importing Sparrows to rescue the trees from the plight of inch worms. Jack dreaded the cross Atlantic journey to the United States, because he gets seasick. But, he wants to come to America for more opportunities at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the people of Philadelphia declare a state of emergency because the trees are disappearing with an infestation of inchworms, the main character comes up with a novel solution to solve a problem, but his community doubts him. He wants to try out his theory and on his own dime and dreading the journey, he once again sails back to his native England to collect sparrows. He returns and sets the sparrows free saving Philadelphia from the infestation. This is a lovely picture book that can be used in any elementary classroom.

### [Super Cilantro Girl](#)

By Juan Felipe Herrera, illustrated by Honorio Robledo Tapia. Children's Book Press, 2003. 32 pages.  
Grades K-4

When Esmeralda Sinfronteras learns her mother, an American citizen, has been stopped at the border for lack of a green card, she transforms into Super Cilantro Girl. Turning green like a bouquet of cilantro, salsa verde, and the earth in spring, Esmeralda the super hero is able to leap over border walls, scale control towers and turn everything cilantro green so the border will disappear, (“sin fronteras”) and her mother can return home.

Written in both English and Spanish by nationally known Mexican-American poet, Juan Filipe Herrera, *Super Cilantro Girl* examines themes of cultural duality, immigrant status and national borders as they affect children. This entertaining, imaginative and brightly illustrated story can be used to initiate classroom explorations into these timely issues with young students.

### [The Color of Home](#)

By Mary Hoffman, illustrated by Karin Hoffman. Phyllis Fogelman Books, 2002. 32 pages.

Grades K-3

Newly emigrated from Somalia and knowing little English, Hassan feels like an outsider. Though his classmates and teacher are friendly, everything is very different in America and he is homesick. When his teacher shows him how to paint, he discovers a way to communicate. Through painting Hassan is able to share the experiences of his family in war-torn Somalia and begin to adjust to his new home. Karin Hoffman's bright expressionistic watercolors compliment this perceptively written story. *The Color of Home* is a book that will appeal to young readers who will easily relate to the adjustment difficulties faced by new immigrants, especially children, as they learn English and adapt to new schools and classmates.

### [No English](#)

By Jacqueline Jules, illustrated by Amy Huntington. Ann Arbor Media Group, 2007. 29 pages.

Grades 1-2

*No English* is a colorfully illustrated picture book tells the story of Blanca, a new girl from Argentina, who struggles to adjust and acclimate to her second grade American classroom. Blanca's story is told from the perspective of her classmate, Diane, who initially has trouble dealing with the fact that they don't speak the same language. Early on, "No English," is all that Spanish speaker, Blanca, can say—thus making her misunderstood by her classmates. However, with the help of her teacher, Mrs. Bertram, the students are able to better understand Blanca by learning about her homeland. This is a lovely story that could be read aloud to students of all ages and will make a lovely addition to any classroom library.

### [Who Belongs Here?: An American Story](#)

Margy Burns Knight. Tilbury House, 1993. 40 pages.

Grades 2-5

Nary, a young refugee from Cambodia, is the subject of the book *Who Belongs Here?* Through narrative and illustrations, the story of Nary's escape from the Khmer Rouge and his resettlement, first in a Thai refugee camp and later in New York City, is told. Accompanying each part of the story is a running commentary on both how and why people immigrate to the United States. This story deals sensitively with the difficulties Nary faces and with the joy he experiences upon being accepted in his new community. This book would work well for young children, who might focus on Nary's story, and with older children, who may use Nary's experience as a way to study immigration history and the process of immigration.

### [Waiting for Papá](#)

By Rene Colato Lainez, illustrated by Anthony Accardo. Arte Publico Press, 2004. 30 pages.  
Grades 1-5

When the family's home in El Salvador is burned down, five-year old Beto and his mother moved to the United States. Unfortunately his father was not able to get a visa and was left behind. Now three years later, Beto expresses his longing for his father as father's Day approaches. Although his mother works closely with an immigration lawyer to bring papa to the U.S., she makes no headway. A class project and a resultant radio broadcast finally open the door to the long awaited reunion. Beto's classmates help him raise money to buy his father a very special gift. The text written in both English and Spanish is too long to be read aloud easily, but does have an endearing quality. The pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations are unimaginative yet simple and straight forward. This book is an adequate introduction to the many issues surrounding immigration and its impact on families. Teachers discussing concepts surrounding refugees may find this book helpful.

### [Coming To America](#)

By Betsy Maestro, illustrated by Susannah Ryan. Scholastic Inc., 1996. 40 pages.  
Grades K-3

From the first nomadic groups, to the colonial settlers, to the Africans forced into slavery, to those seeking refuge from throughout the world, the character of our nation was forged by immigrants as each group enriched the diversity of our nation. *Coming To America* presents the evolving immigration history of the United States to the primary grade student, exploring the factors that brought each group to America as well as their impact on the development of our nation. Vivid illustrations by Susannah Ryan bring the immigration experience to life and will appeal to primary grade students. The chronology of immigration, notes on immigration today, and other interesting facts included in the back of the book will enhance a young child's understanding of the subject.

### [In English, of course](#)

By Josephine Nobisso, Illustrations by Dasha Ziborova. Westhampton Beach, New York: Gingerbread House. 32 pages.  
Grades K-3

In this picture book, Josephine tries to tell her English class about her hometown of Naples, Italy. The teacher, who clearly knows very little about city-life in Italy, tries to help Josephine tell the story. The result is a far-fetched tale about Josephine's life on a farm. This light-hearted story, illustrated with delightful pen and ink drawings, shows the frustrations, and humor, involved in learning a second language. This book would work well for young elementary school students or TESOL students in early or intermediate grades.

### [St. Patrick's Day Shillelagh](#)

By Janet Nolan, illustrated by Ben F. Stahl. Albert Whitman & Co., 2004. 27 pages.  
Grades K-4

Between 1845 and 1851, thousands upon thousands of Irish men, women and children died when the potato crop failed. Fergus and his family immigrated to the U. S. during this time. On his last night home, he cuts a branch from his favorite blackthorn tree in order to “take a piece of Ireland with him on the journey across the ocean”. The branch is whittled into a shillelagh, a walking stick. Within this shillelagh lies the story of the Fergus’s family. Every St. Patrick’s Day, the story of their flight from Ireland is told. Fergus grows up and gives the shillelagh to his son Declan. In turn, Declan gives it to his son Emmet and so it goes, on through the generations. The object becomes an heirloom and continues to be handed down with poetic stories told by family elders. Realistic illustrations add to the passage of time. This is a great introduction to Irish immigration and concepts of family traditions. Teachers in grades 2-4 may find this especially useful when introducing family traditions and/or a unit on Immigration.

### [The Have a Good Day Café](#)

By Frances Park and Ginger Park, illustrated by Katherine Potter. Lee and Low Books, 2005. 32 pages.  
Grades K-3

Mike loves his grandmother, but he wishes she wouldn’t talk so much about her old home in Korea. In the summer Mike, his grandmother, and his parents go to the city each day with their family’s food cart. Mike’s parents sell bagels, juice, hot dogs, and soda while Mike sits on the grass with his grandmother sharing his drawings. One day two other food carts park near Mike’s parents’ cart and business tapers off. Soon after Mike has an idea about how to improve business. He and his grandmother get up early one morning and make Korean food to sell on the cart. It’s a big hit with their customers and Mike discovers that his grandmother’s traditions from Korea are a welcome addition in the U.S.A. as well.

### [Oranges on Golden Mountain](#)

By Elizabeth Partridge, illustrated by Aki Sogabe. Puffin Books, 2001. 40 pages.  
Grades 1-4

When the ponds and streams dry up and the crops shrivel and die, Jo Lee’s mother uses the coins she had hidden to send him to fish with Fourth Uncle on faraway Golden Mountain - California. Knowing he will be homesick, his mother cuts a dozen small branches from her orange trees for him to plant on his new land. After years of tender care and difficult work, the orange branches and Jo Lee flourish and it is time to bring his family to join him on Golden Mountain.

*Oranges on Golden Mountain* reflects the experiences of the many Chinese immigrants who flocked to “Gum Shan” or Golden Mountain, their name for California, during the gold rush of the 1850’s. Young children will enjoy listening to this lyrical and spiritual story as well as looking at the colorful paper cuts which illustrate it. Teachers will appreciate the historical information and web links offered by the author in the afterword.

### [A Gift for Sadia](#)

By Marie Fritz Perry. Buttonweed Press, 2004. (can be adapted for older students) 32 pages.  
Grades K-4

Sadia is a young immigrant from Somalia who arrives to her new home in Minnesota during the coldest part of the winter. This story tells of Sadia's adjustment to her new surroundings and the difficulties she faces as the only Somali speaker at her school. As winter changes to spring Sadia gains the confidence she needs to master a new language and a new culture with the help of a Canadian goose she befriends and cares for. A Gift for Sadia is a poignant story of a young refugee's first experiences in the United States. The colorful illustrations depict aspects of Somali culture as well as aspects of life in a small Minnesota town. The simple language and story line make the book appropriate for young children. This book is one of the few works for children on Somali immigration, and, for that reason, the book is also recommended for older children who are studying current trends in immigration.

### [My Name is Yoon](#)

By Helen Recorvits, illustrated by Gabi Swiathkowaska. Frances Foster Books, 2003. 32 pages.  
Grades K-3

In this beautiful picture book, Yoon, a little girl who has just emigrated from Korea, is having difficulty adjusting to her new life in America. Through first person narrative, the reader meets a confused little girl whose father tells her that she has to learn to write her name in English. She does not like the way that her name looks written in English, and prefers its appearance in Korean. Yoon's name means *Shining Wisdom*, however she struggles to accept that her name when written in English maintains its meaning. The challenge of accepting her English name; parallels her struggle with accepting her life in a new country.

Helen Recorvits' lovely words and Gabi Swiathkowaska's gorgeous illustrations present a story of assimilation that immigrant children often face in a new country. Clearly, this book can be used as a read-aloud and also as a prompt for classroom discussions of identity and related issues.

### [José! Born To Dance](#)

By Susanna Reich, illustrated by Raul Colon. Simon and Schuster, 2005. 32 pages.  
Grades 2-4.

*José! Born To Dance* is a beautifully written and illustrated biography of José Limón (1908-1972), one of the great dancer/choreographers of the twentieth century. José was the oldest child in a large Mexican family that immigrated to the United States after his father lost his job as a result of the Mexican revolution. Taunted in school, José became determined to learn English better than his classmates and within three years, he spoke with confidence. Inspired by his artistic talent, José left his family in California and traveled to New York, where he discovered that his talents lay in dance rather than visual arts. After years of study and hard work, José formed his own dance company, which

continues to tour today. His dances are still performed by major dance companies throughout the world.

Written in poetic prose and illustrated in luminous watercolor and colored pencil, this biography will delight young readers, as well as offer lessons in the connection between determination, hard work, and success.

### [Just Call Me Joe](#)

By Frieda Wishinsky. Orca Book Publishers, 2004. 101 pages.

Grades 2-5

It is the year 1909 and Joseph and Anna's parents have made the tough decision to let their children leave a life of persecution in Russia and emigrate to the United States to be with their Aunt Sophie in New York. They are leaving behind them days of anxiety and fear in their Russian shtetl where murderous soldiers would often sneak up on unfortunate Jews in the woods or come bursting into their homes in the middle of the night. Joseph and Anna are both excited at the adventures and prospects ahead. Following the sea voyage, they soon find that the streets in America are not "paved with gold" and many challenges await them. 17-year-old Anna finds herself working day and night in a dreary clothing factory and 10-year-old Joseph struggles to learn English, make new friends and be accepted by the boys at his new school. He is constantly challenged by his idyllic notions of what he thought America was going to be like. Aunt Sophie takes in boarders just to make ends meet and struggles to provide for them.

Readers will cheer Joseph and Anna as they try to adjust to life in the early twentieth century New York. Although characters were a bit too one-dimensional, this book is a great introduction to immigration stories and historical fiction. Just Call Me Joe is ideal for curriculum units on immigration where teachers want to include an easy to read novel with a stimulating story line.

### [Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story](#)

By Bernard Wolf. Lee & Low Books, 2003. 48 pages.

Grades 2-5

The photo-essay *Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story* is a brightly photographed realistic portrayal of a family's arrival in the United States from Alexandria, Egypt. The father arrives first, after winning a "green card lottery" offered to Egyptians who want to work in America. He worked long hours as a grocer in Queens, N.Y. until he was able to bring his family. Text and beautiful bright color photographs let the reader share the experiences of eight-year-old Rowan Mahmoud and her family once they all arrive. The photos capture the family at home, in school, and at the mosque. Their religion is an integral part of their life, but school, television, and playing with friends take up most of their time. We see the children in American schools with American teachers and schoolwork, but then return home to their Muslim and Egyptian traditions.

Particularly useful in the classroom is the way Wolf tackles immigration issues for both adults and children; the hardships of learning a new language, the economic problems of finding an appropriate job, homesickness etc. At a time when many Muslim and Arab

families in the U.S. feel subject to discriminatory governmental regulations and public attitudes, this book is especially welcome.

### [Hannah Is My Name](#)

Written and Illustrated by Belle Yang. Candlewick Press, 2004. 40 pages.  
Grades K-3

Based on author's first year as an immigrant from Taiwan, *Hannah Is My Name* captures the emotions of a little girl adjusting to a new life. The narrative and illustrations show how much she missed her old school, friends, and customs but felt privileged to be in America. Na Li's family wants to make her fit in by giving her an "American sounding name. They choose Hannah because it is spelled the same backward and they think it will be easy for her because she doesn't know English yet. The illustrations in this book are charming and have an Asian influence and the story is told from the voice of a child. "This book celebrates our shared history of hope by telling the story of a little girl who is waiting for her green card". The book discusses the family looking for an apartment, her family filling out forms with an immigration lawyer, her father hiding from immigration, Hannah's best friend at school being deported, and the arrival of the green cards and her reaction to the blue color of the document her family has been waiting for. This book is an essential for any early childhood classroom and it would be appropriate for upper-grades as well because it discusses the process that the family takes to be free in America and it explains in detail the feelings Hanna has as a new immigrant. Everybody whether they are recent immigrants or celebrating diversity will enjoy this little girl's quest for equal opportunity.

### [Coolies](#)

By Yin, illustrated by Chris Soentpiet. Puffin Books, 2001. 40 pages.  
Grades 4-5

During the Ching Ming festival to honor their ancestors, PawPaw (grandmother) tells her young grandson the story of her great-grandfather Shek and his brother younger brother, Wong. Anxious to find work during desperate times in China, the boys leave their family behind and immigrate to America in the mid 1800s. After a difficult two month voyage, the two arrive in San Francisco and are hired by the Central Pacific Railroad Company to build the tracks towards the east. Enduring dangerous working conditions, primitive equipment, hatred, and prejudice, the two become "coolies," the lowly workers who achieved the amazing feat of building of the transcontinental railroad. Told through the personal story of two brothers, the book explores themes of family loyalty, courage, and sacrifice which are integral to our nation's immigrant history. Illustrated with panoramic paintings, *Coolies* will inform and inspire young readers.

### [Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds – The Sammy Lee Story](#)

By Paula Yoo, illustrated by Dom Lee. Lee and Low Books, 2005. 32 pages.  
Grades K-5

This true story is an inspiration. At age twelve Sammy Lee, the son of Korean American immigrants, sets a lofty goal of winning an Olympic gold medal in diving. Sammy faces

formidable odds including limited access to the public pool due to restrictions for people of color. While Sammy's father reminds him that, "In America, you can achieve anything if you set your heart to it," his father encourages him to limit his diving practice and set his sights instead on becoming a doctor. While in a US Army medical school program, Sammy receives permission to take time out at age twenty-eight to train for the 1948 Olympic diving team. All of Sammy's Olympic dreams come down to an incredible sixteen second dive that wins him the gold medal. The exquisite illustrations enhance this compelling story and the author's note provides fascinating background information to enhance the telling of the emotional journey of young Sammy Lee.

### [When I First Came To This Land](#)

Based on a song by Oscar Brand. Retold by Harriet Ziefert, illustrated by Simms Tyback, G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1998. 32 pages.

Grades K-3

Many baby boomers will remember joyfully singing Oscar Brand's folksong, "When I First Came to this Land," in primary school. Harriet Ziefert's story version, paired with Caldecott Award Winner Simms Taback's lively illustrations, introduces this simple immigration story to another generation of children. The repetitive language and humorous illustrations should appeal to students as they follow the adventures of a typical nineteenth century immigrant pursuing the American dream. Aimed at primary students, this imaginative book could serve as an introduction to American immigration history for students at any grade level.

## For Middle School Students

### [How Tia Lola Came to Stay](#)

By Julia Alvarez. Dell Yearling Books, 2001. 160 pages.

Grades 4-8

When Miguel's crazy Tia Lola comes to visit from the Dominican Republic, he instantly knows that his life is never going to be the same. As Miguel struggles with his parents' divorce and his recent move to rural Vermont from New York City, he is not sure that he needs the wacky presence of his unusual Spanish-speaking aunt added to the chaos in his life. However, he soon realizes that his flamboyant and colorful aunt is just what he needs to spice up his life and bring his family together.

*How Tia Lola Came to Stay* is an uplifting and funny story that upper elementary students will enjoy. Through Julia Alvarez's beautiful descriptions of Tia Lola's exotic cooking, lively music, and vibrant storytelling the reader will be captivated and entertained while learning about Caribbean culture. Possible discussion themes include: family, divorce, tolerance, culture and immigration. This funny and smart book will make a great addition to any classroom library.

### [Ashes of Rose](#)

Mary Jane Auch. Laurel-Leaf Books (Random House), 2002. 246 pages with author's note.  
Grades 5-8.

*Ashes of Rose* begins with the Nolan family's arrival at Ellis Island. Rose Nolan, her parents, and two of her three siblings are permitted to enter the country, but her baby brother is refused entry for medical reasons. Rose's father and brother return to Ireland while Rose and the rest of her family stay in New York. The family tries to adjust to life in the United States, but eventually Mrs. Nolan returns to Ireland, leaving just Rose and her younger sister Maureen in New York. The rest of the novel tells the story of the girls' experiences living and working in New York. The novel brings in many historical elements, including the infamous fire at the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory, to tell a realistic story of working-class immigrant life in early twentieth-century New York. The reading level makes this book appropriate for middle-school students, while the interest-level makes it appropriate for high-school students as well. TESOL students may recognize parts of the story that are familiar even to modern-day immigrants and therefore this novel may also work well for high-level TESOL students.

### [Lupita Manana](#)

By Patricia Beatty. Harper Trophy, 1981. 192 pages.  
Grades 4-8

Following family tragedy in Mexico, Lupita and her brother, Salvador, illegally smuggle themselves into the United States, in order to find work supporting their mother and siblings. Lupita soon discovers that America is not necessarily the land of hope and opportunity that she had expected. Together, brother and sister face difficult labor, the challenge of a new language, and the looming presence of *la migra*- the immigration police. Although each day is trying, this spunky girl maintains the belief that manana- or tomorrow will be a better day.

While *Lupita Manana* explores familiar immigration issues such as learning a new language and feeling like an outsider, it also does something different by addressing illegal immigration from the perspective of a young Mexican girl. This book could serve as a great prompt for classroom discussions and would make a good addition to any classroom library.

### [The Journey That Saved Curious George](#)

By Louise Borden, illustrated by Allan Drummond. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.  
80 pages.  
Grades 4-7

Louise Borden's fascinating account of the journey, the authors of Curious George made when the Nazis invaded France. H.A. Rey and his wife Margret, who were both Jewish, made their escape with the only means of transportation available to them, bicycles. Forced to travel light, the Reys packed a few belongings as well as the manuscripts of their books, including "The Adventures of Fifi", later to be renamed "Curious George". This manuscript was with them as their journey led them to the United States, which became their refuge and permanent home. This exciting author study is complemented by

a combination of photographs of the Reys, illustrations from H.A. Rey's children's books, and original illustrations in the style of H. A. Rey by Allan Drummond.

### [Dreaming Of America: An Ellis Island Story](#)

By Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ben F. Stalh. Troll Bridge Water Paperback, 2000. 32 pages.

Grades 4-6

Teenage Annie Moore and her two younger brothers sail from Cobh, Ireland to be reunited with their parents who had immigrated to America three years earlier. Arriving in New York Harbor, Annie would be the first immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island on January 1, 1892, her fifteenth birthday. To commemorate this event, matching statues of Annie and her brothers stand at the quay in Cobh Harbor and on Ellis Island. *Dreaming of America* is a fictionalized account of Annie's journey to America. Through Annie's story, Eve Bunting, an Irish immigrant herself, explores the hopes and fears of millions of others, who like Annie, made their homes here and helped shape our nation. Vivid illustrations and archival photographs will add to the young readers understanding of this time and events in our history.

### [Shanghai Messenger](#)

By Andrea Cheng, illustrated by Ed Young. Lee and Low, 2005. 40 pgs.

Grades 3-6

Shanghai Messenger is a beautiful book of poetry written by Andrea Cheng and paired with the lovely illustrations of Ed Young. The poems and drawings work together harmoniously, as they tell the story of young Xiao Mei, who is half American and half Chinese and her experiences upon visiting family in Shanghai. Xiao Mei is excited and intrigued about visiting her Chinese family; however she is nervous about the meeting her strange relatives as well as dealing with cultural differences. Ultimately, she learns to appreciate her Chinese heritage through her many experiences in Shanghai, from traditional hair braids, to making wontons and even learning about Tai Chi. Upon returning to the United States, Xiao Mei is filled with pride and appreciation for both her Chinese and American cultures. This is a fantastic book for children ages 9-12 years old, clearly readers will enjoy the book's lovely cadence as well as its thoughtful and heartfelt story and delicate drawings.

### [Mai Ya's Long Journey](#)

By Sheila Cohen. Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2004. 80 pages.

Grades 4-7

This true story of a young Hmong girl and her family's journey from a refugee camp in Thailand to life in Madison, Wisconsin was written by the child's ESL teacher. Mai Ya Xiong, now 25 years old and her family's first college graduate, spent her first seven years trapped in Thailand after her parents narrowly escaped from Laos. Her father had fought against Communists in a secret army developed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Life in Wisconsin challenged the young immigrant girl to keep a balance between her Hmong culture and American ways. The biography includes a

concise look at Hmong animist beliefs, traditions and customs that date back 5,000 years. Photographs of Mai Ya growing up illustrate her story and corroborate an already authentic account. Mai Ya Xiong exemplifies the “can-do” attitude Americans have come to revere in our immigrant stories. The book, complete with timelines, glossary, index, appendix and reading group guidelines, enables students to experience Mai Ya’s contemporary journey in its historical context.

### [Behind The Mountains \(First Person Fiction Series\)](#)

By Edwidge Danticat. Scholastic Inc., 2004. 192 pages.

Grades 6-9

Living in rural Haiti, Celiane Esperance, her mother, and brother Moy anxiously await the cassettes Papa sends them from New York each month. Forced by economic circumstances to seek work in America, Papa has been gone for three years and the family anticipates joining him when the proper visas can be arranged. While visiting an aunt in Port-Au-Prince, Celiane and her mother are nearly killed by a bomb, leaving them more determined to join Papa. Just as there are always more mountains behind the mountains, however, the family finds that there are more challenges to face when they are reunited with Papa in New York. Celiane shares her feelings about her family and experiences through the diary she was awarded by her teacher in Haiti.

Beautifully written by Edwidge Danticat, recognized by *The New York Times* as one of our best young writers, *Behind The Mountains* explores the themes of coming of age, family relationships, separation and reunification, as well as immigration and cultural identity.

*Behind The Mountains* is one of the books in the Scholastic First Person Fiction series exploring the experiences of teenagers of various backgrounds who immigrate to America.

### [The Journal of Otto Peltonen: A Finnish Immigrant](#)

By William Durbin. A Dear America Book, Scholastic, 2000. 170 pages.

Grades 4-8

In 1905, fifteen year old Otto, his mother and two younger sisters, leave the grandparents behind in Finland to join with his father who’s laboring in an iron ore mine in Hibbing, Minnesota. The poor family suffers through an excruciating voyage only to land in a squalid mining camp where Father faces mortal danger six days a week below ground. Otto eventually joins his dad in the mines as the family scrimps and saves to buy a farm. The harsh life, fueled by corruption and corporate callousness, gave rise to the organized labor movement that eventually unionized our mining industry.

Author William Durbin, a high school English teacher in Hibbing, recreates the dismal world that many of the 250,000 Finnish immigrants faced a hundred years ago after escaping the Russian Army and trying to get a foothold in the American dream.

### [Pasquale’s Journey](#)

By Marilyn Freeman. New York: iUniverse, Inc, 2003. 42 pages.  
Grades 3-4

The journey described in the book *Pasquale's Journey* is a familiar immigration story. The opening of the novel finds Pasquale and his family waiting at home in Italy for word from Pasquale's father who has traveled to the United States ahead of them. When Papa finally sends for the family, Mama must sell the family farm and prepare the family for the voyage. The long, difficult sea passage does not diminish the family's happiness upon arriving in the United States. Papa's gift to Pasquale at the very end of the story is an apt metaphor for the promise that awaits Pasquale, and other immigrants, in the United States. The reading level and content matter make this book an appropriate choice for intermediate-level (grades 3-4) elementary school students. The book is also well-suited for TESOL students at any level.

### [The Stone Goddess](#)

By Minfong Ho. Scholastic Inc., 2005. 208 pages.  
Grades 6-9

Twelve-year-old Nakri and her family live comfortably and happily in Phnom Penh until their lives are forever altered by the civil war in Cambodia. Forced out of their homes by Khmer Rouge soldiers, the family flees to safety in the country home of their grandparents. Their security is shattered again when the father and three older siblings, including Nakri, are sent away to forced labor camps. After years of deprivation and loss, Nakri is reunited with members of her family, only to be forced to move again, first to refugee camps in Thailand and finally to a new life in America. Compassionately written, *The Stone Goddess* explores themes of family and culture, war and death, hope and renewal.

*The Stone Goddess* is one of the books in the Scholastic First Person Fiction series exploring the experiences of teenagers of various backgrounds who immigrate to America.

### [We Are Americans: Voices of the Immigrant Experience](#)

By Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. Scholastic Nonfiction, 2003. 192 pages.  
Grades 4 and up

*We Are Americans* is a coffee table book for the classroom, presenting the history of American immigration chronologically, from the new theories of prehistoric immigration to the groups arriving in the present day. Using archival images, artifacts, data charts, and personal narratives, the book explores the factors responsible for immigration, the hopes of immigrants, the hardships of the journey, and adjustments to a new culture, as well as the contributions these new Americans made to our nation. While they learn about the groups and individuals from every culture and continent that formed our country, students will find connections to their own immigration history. This well researched and well produced book offers a detailed index and a further reading list, and is an excellent resource for a study of immigration.

[Living as a Refugee in America: Mohammed's Story](#)

By Helen Howard. World Almanac Library, 2006. 48 pages.  
Grades 4-9

Now in an American high school, Mohammed, 15, tells the story of how he fled the Taliban in Afghanistan and wandered through Iran and Turkey before coming to the U.S. with his mother, brother and sister. *Living as a Refugee in America* weaves Mohammed's story with facts about Afghanistan's recent history and discusses the plight of refugees driven by war and famine across the world. The moving first person narrative, printed in italics, features full-color, captioned photos of Mohammed, his family and friends. It also discusses issues such as discrimination, cultural barriers and maintaining dual identity. This non-fiction book contains a glossary of helpful vocabulary as well suggestions for how students can take action to help the displaced by providing an annotated list of international human rights organizations to contact.

[La Linea](#)

By Ann Jaramillo. Roaring Book Press, 2006. 144 pgs.  
Grades 6-12

The desperate story of Miguel and his younger sister Elena struggling to escape poverty in southern Mexico to join their parents in California is E.S.L. teacher Ann Jaramillo's first novel. Fear of starvation and a longing for family drives these two teenagers into the dark gauntlet of illegal immigration. Violence, corruption and narrow escapes keep the ordeal fast-paced and scary. The siblings survive the journey and face further disappointment through deportation. Compelling and suspenseful, the story exemplifies the plight of countless poor people looking for a better life across the border. While the media argues the big picture of illegal immigrants including jobs, employers, security, fences, mass round-ups and amnesty, Jaramillo looks at the issue from ground level through the eyes of two children with few options. It's a perilous adventure best saved for at least junior high school age students.

[Memories of Sun: Stories of Africa and America](#)

Edited by Jane Kurtz. Greenwillow Books, 2004. 243 pages.  
Grades 5 and up

In *Memories of Sun*, we hear the stories of children who currently live in various parts of Africa, Americans living in or visiting Africa and Africans living in America. Divided into these three distinct sections, the stories express a variety of cultural experiences as well as the imprint these cultures have on the children who inhabit them both. Some stories are touching, some humorous and some heartbreaking. All are unforgettable.

Jane Kurtz, a self described "third culture kid," was born in the U.S. but raised for most of her childhood in Ethiopia. In *Memories of Sun*, she has created an anthology of twelve stories and three poems that speak in the voices of children who share that duality of culture. The back of the book contains an informative section about the authors. Students will find much to learn and relate to once they read these powerful stories.

### [Drita, My Homegirl](#)

By Jenny Lombard. Putnam Juvenile, 2006. 176 pages.

Grades 3-5

*Drita My Homegirl* is the story of Drita, a Muslim Albanian refugee who has immigrated to New York City from war-torn Kosovo. Drita longs to make friends in school, but faces difficulty due to her limited English. *Drita My Homegirl* is narrated through alternating chapters told from the perspective of two fourth graders, Drita and Maxie. As their stories unfold, their unlikely friendship grows against the backdrop of both girls feeling a bit like outsiders. Drita is trying to deal with immigrating as well as her mother's depression, and at the same time she is also struggling to fit in at school. Maxie, on the other hand, appears to be a fun-loving comedian at school, but she too is struggling outside of school as she attempts to deal with the death of her mother. As these unlikely friends come together, the themes of family, friendship, and love resonate. *Drita My Homegirl* is appropriate for grades 3-5 and would be an excellent title read aloud that could be used to engage students in group discussions.

### [Twist of Gold](#)

By Michael Morpurgo. Egmont Books, 2004. 304 pages.

Grades 4-6

Two Irish children, hounded by starvation and plague, escape the potato famine, and leave behind three dead siblings as well as a dying mother to venture by sailing ship to America in search of their father. The kids find themselves working the streets of Boston before heading west across the continent via riverboat and wagon train to find their father and no-longer dying mother. (Wait. How'd she get well and go from Cork County to California?) Sean and Annie endure crooks, shipwreck, and getting stranded the desert; but they prevail.

Besides the inexplicable use of apostrophes for quotation marks, the problem with this book is its loose connection to historical accuracy. It's a fast-paced fantasy adventure story that fails to capture a realistic portrayal of the American immigrant experience.

### [The Irish Dresser](#)

By Cynthia Neale. White Mane Publishing Company, 2003. 100 pages.

Grades 2-6

*The Irish Dresser* is fantastic historical fiction which tells the story of Ireland's Potato Famine that occurred between 1845 and 1850. Told from the perspective of thirteen year old Nora McCabe, the reader experiences her family's struggle to survive. Nora decides to escape by hiding in her family's dresser aboard the ship, fantasizing about food and a better life. The reader experiences the difficult journey experienced by over two million Irish through Nora's touching story. Surely, students will be engaged by the McCabe family's tragic and difficult voyage to America in search of food, as well as Nora's vivid and descriptive voice. *The Irish Dresser* is an exciting story about the reality of taking risks and facing the unknown. This title will make a fantastic read aloud and could be enjoyed by students in grades 2-6.

### [Zayda Was A Cowboy](#)

By June Levitt Nislick. Jewish Publication Society, 2005. 74 pages.  
Grades 4-7

Nislick's book tells of her grandfather when he immigrated to America as part of the "Galveston Plan", an effort to bring Jewish immigrants to the western United States in the early 20th century. Framed as a story within a story, Zayda's unusual immigration story is told to his grandchildren when he comes to live with them. Zayda describes his life with his family before he is forced to run away to avoid conscription into the Czar's army which, as a Jew, would have led to cruel treatment, even death. After leaving his small Russian town, Zayda made his way to Bremen, Germany where he worked to earn the fare for a ticket to America. Landing in Galveston, Texas, Zayda, whose name was changed to Mike Benson, is greeted by a representative of the Jewish Immigrants Information Bureau, who helps him find a job as a ranch hand. As the story unfolds it describes Zayda's life on the ranch, learning to speak English (and Spanish, as many of the other ranch hands are Mexican), and working on a cattle drive from Texas to Kansas City where he settled and became part of the Jewish community.

### [Dear Miss Breed](#)

By Joanne Oppenheim. Scholastic Nonfiction, 2006. 288 pages.  
Grades 6 to adult

In telling the story of Clara Breed, the children's librarian of the San Diego Public Library and her devotion to the Japanese American children, once her patrons, who were incarcerated in prison camps during World War II, Joanne Oppenheim reminds us not only of a shameful and pain-filled chapter in American history, but also how as individuals we can often make a difference. The story of this remarkable woman and her relationship with her children is told through the letters the children wrote, testimony given to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1980-81, recent interviews and correspondence with the now adult children, as well as news accounts from the war period. *Dear Miss Breed* is an accessible account of World War II for children ages ten and up, and would be a wonderful guide to spark discussions with children about democracy, freedom, war and Nikkei history in America. Thoughtful parallels can be drawn between the events in *Dear Miss Breed* and events in our own times.

### [Esperanza Rising](#)

By Pam Munoz Ryan. Scholastic, 2000. 288 pages.  
Grades 4-8

Set during the Great Depression, *Esperanza Rising* is a lovely story of self-acceptance in a foreign environment. As told through the perspective of young Esperanza, the book begins with the characters comfortably living luxurious rancho life in Mexico- that is until Esperanza's father is tragically killed. Following his death, Esperanza and her mother have no other choice but to immigrate to California in order to find work. Thus begins their journey of assimilation within a new country and social class. Having lived a privileged life, it is not easy for Esperanza to remake herself while adjusting to life as a migrant farm worker.

Teachers will appreciate the book's connections between the cultural, economical and political issues of California during the 1930's. This fantastic coming of age story corresponds with a historical backdrop of strikes and the labor movement, government sweeps, and injustice. Pam Munoz Ryan's fascinating book is based upon her maternal grandmother's experience of immigrating to California from Mexico. Esperanza's struggles and her ability to rise above her difficulties will surely spark conversation within the classroom. This book is great for whole class reading and as a link to exploring historical connections.

### [Blue Jasmine](#)

By Kashmiri Sheth. Hyperion Books for Children, 2004. 192 pages.  
Grades 4-8

Inspired by the author's own experiences, *Blue Jasmine* tells the story of a teenager who immigrates from a small town in India to a large American city. Leaving behind the comfort of her loving extended family and friends, twelve year old Seema Trivedi moves to Iowa City when her father accepts a new job offer. There she learns not only a new culture and language, but also that in America, like India, one must look past the façade to discover the true value of people. While *Blue Jasmine* examines many familiar immigration issues such as fear of being the outsider, cultural duality, and difficulty of learning a new language, Kashmiri Sheth's novel fills a void in children's literature by presenting this story from an Indian teenager's perspective. Since very little children's literature exists on the topic, this award winning book is a welcome addition to classroom libraries.

### [Finding My Hat](#)

By John Son. Scholastic, 2003. 192 pages.  
Grades 7-9

An outstanding addition to Scholastic's excellent First Person Fiction series, *Finding My Hat*, tells the story of the Parks, a first generation Korean-American family, in the 1970s and 80s. Told in vignettes from the point of view the eldest child and only son, the story, traces Jin-Han's life from his first memories at the age of two to his mother's death when he is a teenager. Jin-Han and his family move from Chicago to Memphis to Houston as the family struggles to find a place for themselves in America and Jin-Han struggles to find his own identity, "his hat," from among his Korean traditions, his American attitudes, and his own special gifts. The vignettes are often hilarious, as when pre-school Jin-Han wets his pants, or pre-teen Jin-Han discovers girls, while the incident recalling Jin-Han's mother's tragic illness and death is poignant and moving. This engrossing novel captures the universal aspects of Jin-Han's coming of age, as well as, the experiences of an immigrant family adjusting to life in the United States. A valuable feature of the series is an afterword in which the writer describes his or her own experiences of immigrating to the United States. The reading level and subject matter make this book appropriate for seventh through ninth grade and TESOL students. It would work well as reading for social studies and English in studies of culture, immigration, point of view, character development, and style.

### [The Arrival](#)

By Shaun Tan. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007. 128 pgs.  
Grades 4-12

In this wordless graphic novel, through magnificent illustrations, Tan captures the disorientation immigrants may feel toward their new surroundings. It depicts the journey of one man who seems both accepted and rejected by his new country. The only writing is in an invented alphabet, which motivates the viewer to feel confused just like the immigrants must feel when they encounter a strange new language and way of life. A feeling of tolerance and acceptance is presented throughout the story and transcends race and ethnicity. The youngest readers and the most sophisticated will find this book interesting. This book is an excellent conversation starter in any mainstream or ESL classroom.

### [Flight to Freedom](#)

Ana Veciana-Suarez. Scholastic, 2002. 240 pages.  
Grades 7-9

Another wonderful addition to Scholastic's superb First Person Fiction series, *Flight to Freedom*, tells the story of the Garcia family who in 1967 flee from Cuba to Miami, Florida. The story is told through the diary entries of thirteen-year-old Yara Garcia. In Cuba Yara hates the compulsory youth work camps and the strict food rations. However, once Yara is in Miami, she misses the family left behind in Cuba, and she struggles with family tensions, a new language, and a new school. While Yara's father joins an anti-Castro group and insists that the family will soon be back in Cuba, Yara, her mother, and her sisters slowly adjust to their new life and opportunities in America. The story is absorbing, with believable characters and informative detail. An effective feature of the series is an afterword in which the writer describes his or her own experiences of immigrating to the United States. The reading level and subject matter make this book appropriate for seventh through ninth grade and TESOL students. It would work well as reading for social studies and English in studies of culture, immigration, point of view, character development, and style.

### [Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy](#)

By Andrea Warren. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004. 110 pages.  
Grades 5-12

At the end of the Vietnam War, an eight-year-old "Amerasian" boy named Long flees his country and finds a loving home with his adoptive family in Ohio. The author recounts the story of Long's life—from his birth and early childhood, shadowed by his father's abandonment and his mother's suicide, to boyhood in Saigon with his loving yet struggling grandmother who eventually makes the agonizing decision to put him up for adoption. Long, now age nine, becomes part of *Operation Babylift*, the US-coordinated effort that evacuated more than 2,000 children from Saigon in just three days in 1975. This photo-essay from Long's emotional point of view is interspersed with just the right amount of history. *Escape* is ideal for middle and upper grade classrooms studying various immigration themes including lost heritage, poverty, separation and family relations.

### *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*

By Mary Williams, illustrated by Gregory Christie. Lee and Low Books, 2005. 40 pages.  
Grades 3-6

As the result of renewed fighting in Sudan in the mid 1980's, thirty thousand orphaned, homeless boys were forced to walk almost one thousand miles through eastern Africa in search of refuge. Based on true accounts as told to her by some of these Lost Boys, Mary Williams' story describes the experiences of eight-year-old Garang, as he seeks safety after his village is destroyed by war.

Unable to find his family, Garang wanders down the road where he joins thousands of other boys, who like him, were spared because they were tending their family animals when the war came upon their villages. Organizing themselves into groups, the boys travel east to Ethiopia, hunting for food, caring for younger ones, and avoiding the soldiers along the way. After finding safety in an Ethiopian refugee camp, the boys are forced to flee again, this time to Kenya, when war erupts in Ethiopia. Eventually, some find safety in the United States. This inspirational story of courage and survival provides students a starting point for a deeper study of the effects of war on civilian populations, especially children.

In her Author's Note and Afterword, Mary Williams describe her experiences with these children that inspired her to write their story and create a foundation to support their adjustment to life in America.

### *The Orphan of Ellis Island*

By Elvira Woodruff. Scholastic, 1997. 174 pgs.  
Grades 4-6

A class field trip turns into the adventure of a lifetime when young Dominic Cantori, an orphan, visits Ellis Island. Uncomfortable with all of the discussion about ancestry during the field trip, Dominic wanders off from the group, falls asleep in a utility closet, and soon finds himself swept away to another time and place. This time travel trip takes Dominic to Italy in 1908 where he befriends three orphaned brothers. He discovers the harsh conditions that compelled people to leave their homes and seek refuge in the United States. Dominic joins the brothers as they leave Italy and he experiences first hand what it felt like to travel as a steerage passenger aboard a ship to America. Upon entering New York harbor he is elated to see the Statue of Liberty and soon discovers the challenges immigrants faced at Ellis Island. When Dominic returns to the present he has developed a deeper appreciation of the struggles of those long ago immigrants and welcomes the opportunity to be placed with a foster family that is eager to adopt a child like him.

### *American Born Chinese*

By Gene Luen Yan. First Second, 2006. 233 pages.  
Grades 6 to 12

*American Born Chinese* is a graphic novel that cleverly takes readers through a journey that combines three storylines and three characters into one idea. The stories merge into

a single narrative that looks at stereotype, immigration, and assimilation. The graphic novel interweaves Chinese mythology with the American Dream. Students are sure to enjoy the images and text through the quick moving stories. Teachers will find the book surprisingly useful as a springboard for discussions about discrimination, tolerance, stereotyping and immigration.

## For High School Students

### [The Other Side Of The Sky: A Memoir](#)

By Farah Ahmedi with Tamim Ansary. Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2005. 249 pages.  
Grades 9-12

Farah Ahmedi was seven years old when she stepped on a landmine in her neighborhood in Kabul, Afghanistan and lost her left leg. A few years later, most of her family died in a Taliban rocket attack and Farah was forced to flee with her ailing mother across the border to Pakistan. There Farah and her mother trekked precariously from city to city and finally managed to secure admission into the U.S. as refugees—only to find that the struggle to survive, adapt and prosper was far from over. *The Other Side of the Sky* paints a vivid picture of the bewildering and even terrifying experiences refugees undergo in the apparent safety of American suburbs and public high schools. Throughout the memoir, however, Farah's faith, resilience and intellectual curiosity lead her from one inspirational triumph to the next. For all of Farah's suffering at the hands of others, her account persistently underlines that "strangers have been kind when it mattered most." *The Other Side of the Sky* is a refreshingly hopeful, at times humorous, and deeply moving story of a powerful young woman's improbable success.

### [How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents](#)

By Julia Alvarez. Penguin, 1992. 290 pages.  
Grades 9-12

This novel is both a family saga and a coming-of-age story. Each of the four Garcia sisters tells her own story of the family's flight from the Dominican Republic and their subsequent adjustment to life in the United States. The novel is largely set in the 1960's, a time of political upheaval in the country the Garcia family left and of great social change in the country they adopted. The novel treats on many themes common to the immigrant experience – intergenerational conflict, bonds to home country and culture, and cross-cultural misunderstanding – as well as themes that are more particular to the experience of political refugees. Because this novel contains some mature material, it is recommended for high school students.

### [West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story](#)

By Tamim Ansary, Picador, 2003. 304 pages.  
Grades 9-12

*West of Kabul, East of New York* is an autobiography about a man entrenched in two cultures, seemingly stuck between his Afghan roots and his experience as an American immigrant. Tamin Ansary recalls his boyhood life in Afghanistan, describes his venture into the San Francisco hippie scene of the '70s and his travels throughout the Middle Eastern world of Islam in an effort to define his own spirituality. Ansary's impassioned email, written the day after the 9/11 attacks, reached millions of Americans and the author's own story is an effort to bridge the ever-widening gap between his heritage and his adopted home. Tamim's story is fascinating, at times frightening and always informative.

[\*Of Beetles & Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey From a Refugee Camp to Harvard\*](#)

By Mawi Asedom. Little, Brown & Co, 2002. 192 pages.

Grades 6-12

*Of Beetles & Angels* is a contemporary autobiography of a young man's journey to success. When he was four years old, Asgedom's family left their war-ravaged home in Ethiopia and spent three years in a Sudanese refugee camp before coming to the U.S. in 1983. He later earned a full scholarship to Harvard where in 1999 he delivered the commencement address. Told from Mawi's point of view as a teenager, he describes the conditions in Ethiopia, their escape to Sudan's refugee camp and finally their emigration to America. Once in the United States, things don't immediately fall into place. Mawi is faced with many trials and tribulations, hardships and pain. Nonetheless, he follows his father's advice to "treat all people- even the most unsightly beetles – as though they were angels sent from heaven," Mawi overcomes racial prejudice, language barriers and financial disadvantage, eventually realizing his dream. This is both an inspirational and positive immigration story highly recommended for teens and young adult's grades 6 – high school. A terrific read aloud as well.

[\*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier\*](#)

By Ishmael Beah. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2007. 229 pages.

Grades 7-12

Ishmael Beah led a typical pre-teen life in Sierra Leone—hanging out with friends, going to school, performing American hip-hop songs. But when the civil war reached his village in 1992, he becomes separated from family and friends and sets off on a harrowing journey of survival through a country ravaged by war and atrocity. Captured by government troops when he is thirteen, this gentle boy is traumatized, hooked on drugs and trained to kill. Beah's beautifully written memoir tells a riveting story of fear, loss, violence, friendship and redemption. The themes of this book are relevant to adolescents today and would spark fascinating class discussions.

[\*What Is The What: The Autobiography Of Valentino Achak Deng. A Novel.\*](#)

By Dave Eggers. McSweeney's, 2006. 475 pgs.

Grades 12 to adult

This fictionalized autobiography, closely based on the oral history of a Sudanese "Lost Boy," is experimental, ambitious and most suitable for advanced high school, college and

adult readers. Tracking back and forth chronologically between the narrator's present day travails in Atlanta and his memories of displacement and refugee camp life in the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya, *What is the What* presents a fascinating web of experience. Far from simply offering one more reiteration of the fairly well-known "Lost Boy" narrative, Eggers' account raises several new and unsettling questions. Does trauma really end when a refugee is resettled in the "first world," or does trauma perhaps increase upon resettlement? What is the fate of a *cause célèbre* after the attention of the media and donors moves on and when sympathy for a given refugee community wears thin? How and why do transnational communities become burdensome and destructive rather than resourceful and resilient for forced migrants? Conversely, what opportunities for education, love, friendship and creativity become possible in the constrained environs of a refugee camp? Eggers account is a valuable reminder of the moral ambiguities and experiential complexities of the Sudanese "Lost Boy" story.

### [Bento Box in the Heartland](#)

By Linda Furiya, Seal Press, 2006. 256 pages.  
Grades 7-12

*Bento Box in the Heartland* is a coming-of-age memoir telling the story of a young girl's struggle to assimilate in her tiny Indiana town as the only Asian student in her school. Each day, as she takes out her lunch, Linda Furiya feels self-conscious about her parents' insistence on sending their native Japanese cuisine in her lunch box. Looking around, she realizes that her lunches are different from her peers. Yet at the same time, the rice balls that her mother packs, rather than a sandwich like all of the other students, bring much comfort and delight to Furiya. Each chapter closes with a recipe of one of the author's most treasured meals. *Bento Box in the Heartland* is more than a story about food. Most importantly, it is the story of a young woman trying to find herself as the only Asian in her school during the 1960's. In addition, it is the story of growing up with immigrant parents and trying to figure out who she is, as well as better understanding her parents' connection to Japan. Beautifully written, *Bento Box in the Heartland* is a fantastic conflation of stories, recipes, and self-discovery.

### [First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants](#)

Edited by Donald R. Gallo. Candlewick, 2004. 240 pages.  
Grades 7-11

First Crossing, a collection of ten first-person narratives, tells the stories of teen-age immigrants to the United States. While the stories in this collection cover diverse immigration experiences, each story deals with the challenges that are unique to adolescents arriving in a new country. The stories, though fiction, deal with the difficult realities many immigrant teenagers face, realities such as self-doubt, social and linguistic isolation, racism, and family conflict. The reading level and subject matter of this book make it suitable for middle school and high school students. The collection lends itself well to opportunities for discussion and writing extensions.

### [Newcomers to America: Stories of Today's Young Immigrants](#)

By Judith E. Greenberg. Franklin Watts Library, 1996. 128 pages.  
Grades 8-12

*Newcomers to America* is an interesting collection of interviews and conversations that candidly introduce over a dozen immigrants who tell their tales of leaving their countries and coming to the United States. The interviews capture the adaptation to a new culture and language, their steps toward citizenship, their traditions, and their hardships and successes. Although the immigrants interviewed in this book represented every corner of the world, most of the immigrants interviewed settled in the DC Baltimore area; it would have been nice to hear from immigrants in other parts of the country. The title of this book is also a bit confusing, because some of the interviewees came to the United States 50 years ago and a reader may be expecting the stories in this book to reflect the experiences of recent young immigrants. Overall the book does a good job explaining immigration from a historical and political aspect through the interviews and the author's additions. The best feature of *Newcomers to America* is the 20-page *Food Potpourri* collection of recipes in the back of the book that were contributed by the participants in this book.

### [Born Confused](#)

Tanuja Desai Hidier. Scholastic, 2002. 500 pages.  
Grades 9-12

Seventeen-year-old Dimple Lala believes that she is isolated from the Indian community of her immigrant parents and the American world of her contemporaries. When her parents arrange a meeting with a "suitable boy," Karsh Kapoor, Dimple has no interest in getting to know him. However, when Dimple's best friend, perfect, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Gwyn, starts to pursue Karsh and to explore Indian culture in order to attract him, Dimple finds herself learning to appreciate Indian culture and falling in love with Karsh. The language of the narrative is filled with striking imagery as befits Dimple, an accomplished photographer. *Born Confused* presents an absorbing account of the Indian-American experience from the viewpoint of a perceptive and artistic young woman.

### [China Boy](#)

By Gus Lee. Penguin, 1994. 322 pages.  
Grades 8-12

The semi-autobiographical novel, *China Boy*, set in the predominantly Black Panhandle area of San Francisco, California, is the story of seven-year-old Kai Ting, the only son of a high born Mandarin family. After the tragic death of Kai's mother when he is six, Kai is ill-treated by his white stepmother, who is determined to erase everything Chinese from the Ting home, and by the neighborhood bullies, who are physically violent toward Kai. After Kai is supported by Toussaint and Mama La Rue who teach Kai about friendship, by Uncle Shim who teaches Kai about noble Chinese traditions and by a group of retired boxers at the YMCA who teach Kai to defend himself, he is able to confront the neighborhood bullies and stand up to his stepmother. Lee's novel renders the vibrancy of the Asian-American immigrant experience through a thoroughly appealing protagonist and rich supporting characters.

### [Facing the Lion](#)

By Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton. National Geographic Children's Books, 2003. 144 pages.

Grades 5-12

This autobiographical story about growing up on the African Savanna of Kenya and ultimately coming to America tells an amazing odyssey of a poor farm boy who becomes an award winning educator in the United States. Upon reading the story, students will be able to take a close look at the life of the nomadic Maasai. This fantastic book encourages young readers to see that they can overcome their obstacles and create positive goals in life just as Lekuton did. Lekuton's storytelling is fantastic and will surely capture the attention of readers of all ages. Note: Lekuton has since returned to Kenya where he was elected into the Senate.

[\*Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail\*](#)

By Ruben Martinez, Picador, 2002. 352 pages.

Grade 12 - Adult

Ruben Martinez's engaging and authoritative account of the Chavez family's struggle to live in Cheran, Mexico and work in the U.S. illustrates how the long-time U.S. message "We have jobs for you" has changed to "We have jobs for you, but you'll have more trouble getting across the line." Three Chavez brothers were killed as victims in a high-speed chase crossing the border. Martinez followed migrant workers to California, Arkansas and even Norwalk, Wisconsin where he found the Enriquez family working the night shift in a meatpacking plant. Martinez, whose grandfather came to the U.S. as a field hand, brings the readers right into small village life in Southern Mexico—through the treacherous border crossings and into the toxic fields where migrants toil. This is an excellent read for adults, especially with the historical backdrop the author provides.

[\*Crossing into America: The New Literature of Immigration\*](#)

Edited by Louis Mendoza and S. Shankar. The New Press, 2003. 365 pages.

Grades 9-12

This excellent anthology captures the experiences of new immigrants (those who have come since the legislative reforms of 1965) through fiction, memoir, poetry, and personal essays. The selections, by immigrants or children of immigrants, are organized to illustrate a chronicle of immigration. Part I portrays preparations and "the crossing;" Part II presents reflections on "the crossing" and on the place of arrival; Part III presents background and analysis. Noted authors such as Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros, Jamaica Kincaid, Maxine Hong Kingston, Chang-Rae Lee, Frank McCourt, and Richard Rodriguez, as well as new voices, are represented in this stirring and poignant collection. The reading level and subject matter make this book appropriate for high school students. The book may also succeed with some high level TESOL students. It would work well as reading for social studies and English classes in studies of culture, immigration, point of view, genre, and style.

[\*A Step from Heaven\*](#)

By An Na. Penguin, 2001. 154 pages.

Grades 8-12

*A Step from Heaven* is told through the eyes of Young Ju in a series of titled vignettes as she grows from preschooler to young woman. When five-year-old Young Ju and her family emigrate from Korea to California, Young Ju believes that the United States will be heaven, a place filled with love, happiness and riches. Life in the United States is more difficult, however, than Young Ju and her family had ever imagined. In a classic immigrant child conflict, Young Ju struggles to adjust to American ways and then disobeys her father in order to participate in typically American activities. The pressures of immigration and working long hours at multiple jobs lead Young Ju's father to become an increasingly violent alcoholic. Young Ju, her mother and her brother contend with the damaging effects of the father's abuse until Young Ju valiantly takes steps that set the family on the path to healing. The novel touchingly captures the ordeals of an immigrant family adjusting to life in this country. The reading level and subject matter make this book appropriate for eighth through twelfth grade students. The book may also succeed with some high level TESOL students. It would work well as reading for social studies and English in studies of culture, immigration, abuse, poverty, point of view, character development, and style.

### [Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story](#)

By Pegi Deitz Shea. New York: Clarion Books, 2003. 220 pages.  
Grades 9-12.

*Tangled Threads* chronicles the immigration story of a young Hmong girl whose experiences parallel those of refugees from many parts of the world. Mai Yang is fifteen years old when she and her grandmother leave the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand to reunite with her uncle's family in Providence, Rhode Island. In a realistic, yet sympathetic, way the novel tells of Mai Yang's long journey to the United States and her difficult adjustment to life with her assimilated family and indifferent American classmates and teachers. The end of the novel, by which time Mai Yang has found a place for herself in her family, her school and in the Hmong-American community, is a testament to the will of immigrants.

Because of some graphic scenes and difficult subject-matter, this novel would be best for a high-school audience. The reading level makes it well suited for high-school TESOL students.

### [Digging to America](#)

By Anne Tyler. Knopf, 2006. 288 pages.  
Grades 9-12

When the Yazdans, an Iranian-American couple, and the Donaldsons cross paths at Baltimore's Airport while receiving their adopted Korean baby girls, they begin a relationship that touches three generations. The Donaldsons, Brad and Bitsy, an upper middle class couple with an enthusiastic extended family, refer to their little girl as Jin-Ho while Sami and Ziba Yazdan, name their daughter Susan. The story follows Jin-Ho and Susan's formative years via the relationships formed between the families. The good folks of *Digging to America* live normal, happy lives enriched by their efforts to embrace diversity; something that happens frequently in real life too.

[\*First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers\*](#)

By Loung Ung. Harper Perennial, 2000. 272 pages.

Grades 10-12

*First They Killed My Father* is a poignant story told from the perspective of a child who is experiencing the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970's. This true story of the daughter of a high-ranking government official in Phnom Penh, who was in imminent danger because of her family's status. Her descriptions of the events are poignant, compelling and informative. The memoir is captivating and illustrates the dispersion of her family, the brutality that she had to endure, and the plight of many of the immigrants from Cambodia. Bolstered by the shocking bravery of one brother and sustained by her sister's gentle kindness amid brutality, Loung forged ahead to create a courageous new life. Harrowing yet hopeful, insightful and compelling, this family's story is truly unforgettable. The content is disturbing and violent, but it can be used in a high school classroom.

[\*The Devil's Highway\*](#)

By Luis Alberto Urrea. Little, Brown & Company, 2004. 143 pgs.

Grades 9 and up

The Devil's Highway is a stirring story of twenty-six men who crossed the Mexican border into the harsh Devil's Highway of Southern Arizona. Through Urrea's in-depth investigative work, the reader is able to enter into the deadly, desolate region where only twelve men were able to make it out alive after being abandoned by their coyotes. Urrea's work is a well-crafted combination of interviews and first-person testimony, history, culture, and immigration policy. The Devil's Highway was a finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction. This is an excellent book for use in a high school classroom and would allow students an opportunity to closely examine illegal immigration.

[\*Immigration in the United States: Africans in America\*](#)

By Richard Worth and Robert Asher, PH. D., General Editor. Facts on File, Inc, 2005. 96 pages.

Grades 5-8

It is a pleasure to finally find a book that really examines the history of Africans in America in the context of "Immigration". Students studying U.S. immigrant groups will benefit from this wonderful series volume with the same overview of immigration including some working definitions in the introduction. A brief history of the population's native country emphasizes the conditions that resulted in the U.S. Chronological chapters follow, each ending with a discussion of contemporary life. All include maps, interesting photographs, facts and a very useful glossary. This is a terrific book for research. Chapters include Involuntary Immigrants, Jim Crow and Racial Hatred, African Immigrants in Their New Land, etc. We have searched long and hard for a book like this. Highly recommended!