
Sample Lesson 22: The Immigrant Experience of Lao Americans

Theme: History and Movement

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 4, 5, 6

Standards Alignment:

HSS Content Standard: 11.11

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RH.9–10.1, 2, 3, 7; WHST.9–10.2, 4, 5; SL.9–10.1

LESSON PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW:

Students will discuss the reasons for the changing immigration policies of the United States, with emphasis on how the Immigration Act of 1965 and successive acts transformed American society with focus on the unique challenges confronting Lao American immigrants and the different groups among them (for example, Lao, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Akha).

Students will learn how the lesser-known immigrants from Laos have contributed to greater diversity in American society since the middle of the twentieth century.

Key Terms and Concepts (This section ties into larger unit key terms but may also include terms specific to the lesson.): the evolving US immigration policies since 1965, the effects of the policies on Lao Americans, the contributions of the policies to the diversity of the population of the United States, refugee

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to ...):

- Discuss the reasons for the nation's changing immigration policy, with emphasis on how the Immigration Act of 1965 and successive acts have transformed American society
- Understand the unique challenges confronting Lao American immigrants and the different groups among them (for example, Lao, Hmong, Iu-Mien, Akha)
- Examine the origins and stages of Lao American immigration and its effects on Lao Americans
- Learn how the lesser-known immigrants from Laos have contributed to greater diversity in American society since the middle of the twentieth century
- Understand how the Vietnam War changed US immigration policy since 1975

Essential Questions:

1. During which period of US policy immigration did your family arrive in the United States? How has that policy supported or not supported your family?
2. How have the immigration policies of 1975 and 1980 benefited the United States?
3. What current policies exist to support the original intentions of the United States to be a country that receives all who are oppressed?

Lesson Steps/Activities:

1. The teacher opens class by giving a brief lecture on the following: At the end of the Vietnam War, the Royal Lao Government was overthrown by the Pathet Lao in a communist revolution. Lao individuals or families politically aligned with the United States were allowed entry to the US with the passage of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1975. The Refugee Act of 1980 authorized further Lao refugee migration to the US. Between 1975 and 1992, over 230,000 (up to 400,000 by some estimates) Lao, Hmong, Khmu, Iu-Mien, Tai Dam, Tai Lue, Lua, Akha, Lahu, and other ethnic communities from Laos immigrated to the US, primarily to California, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Texas.
2. The teacher then shows a short film clip, “The Betrayal,” on the Lao immigrant experience.
3. Classroom
 - a. Individual: Students read packet materials in class to prepare for student presentations and discussion comparing and contrasting experiences of Lao immigrants, independently organizing information in the notetaking guide while viewing the video and reading, identifying and evaluating sources in each media format. (The teacher models writing down points on the organizer.)
 - b. Small Group: Each group is assigned one memoir or oral history account. Students discuss the main ideas and details. They then create a visual display/poster that communicates the immigrant experience (e.g., isolate one quotation for presentation). The teacher will demonstrate before the small group discussion.
 - c. Large Group: The class holds a discussion on the immigrant experience of Lao Americans. Each student shares their response to the discussion. Students compare and contrast the unique and common/general aspects of each memoir or oral history account.

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4. Homework: Students write an essay or letter describing their critical analysis and their opinion on how federal, state, or local government policy should be changed to better aid new immigrants in their integration into American society. This may include the student's opinion of the US government's role in assisting migrants from Laos stemming from the US involvement in the war in Laos.

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection:

- Accurately present facts from the videos and readings as support for their opinion on the war
- Clearly express their position on the war during class debate and small group discussion
- Correctly identify its influence on US foreign policy

Materials and Resources:

Materials

- Video: "The Betrayal" (Nerakhoon)
- Packet:
 - Thavisouk Phrasavath. 2010. *Stepped Out of the Womb: A Memoir of a Journey to the Land Where the Sun Falls*. Lao Century Media. Chapter 6, Coming To America.
 - Khamsamong Somvong. 1989. "Not so wonderful was that time." In *Indochina's Refugees: Oral Histories from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam*, by Joanna Catherine Scott. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.
 - Kao Kalia Yang. 2008. *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press. Chapter 8, Before the Babies.
- Writing Prompt: Homework (see step 4)

Resources

General Works:

- Jeremy Hein. 1995. *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*. New York, NY: Twayne Publishers.
- Jonathan H. X. Lee and the Center for Lao Studies. 2012. *Laotians in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
- W. Courtland Robinson. 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*. London, UK: Zed Books.

Lao Immigrant Memoirs:

- Bounsang Khamkeo. 2006. *I Little Slave: A Prison Memoir from Communist Laos*. Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press. Interview: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/ch4.asp#link231>.
- Kao Kalia Yang. 2008. *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.
- Kao Kalia Yang. 2016. *The Song Poet: A Memoir of My Father*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.
- Joanna Catherine Scott. 1989. *Indochina's Refugees: Oral Histories from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.
- Nakhonkham Bouphanouvong. 2004. *Sixteen Years in the Land of Death: Revolution and Reeducation in Laos*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus Press.
- Sucheng Chan, ed. 1994. *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Thavisouk Phrasavath. 2010. *Stepped Out of the Womb: A Memoir of a Journey to the Land Where the Sun Falls*. Lao Century Media.

Documentary Film

- “The Betrayal” (Nerakhoon), written and directed by Ellen Kuras and Thavisouk Phrasavath

Ethnic Studies Outcomes:

- Students expand on previous lessons covering US foreign policy during the Cold War, including the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement, and the US Civil Rights movement.
- Students recognize the Laotian American refugee experiences, their unbreakable spirit through survival and resilience, and that visibility, acknowledgment, and celebration through ethnic studies provides Southeast Asian American youth and their colleagues with an understanding around a subject that is historically overlooked.