

## Literature with Immigration Themes

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### Picture Books and Elementary

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#### **When Africa Was Home** Karen Lynn Williams 2007

Peter, a white American, is entirely at home in a Malawian village. When he has to go to America with his parents, he feels displaced, and waits patiently until their joyful return to the village, where he is once again at home. Williams evokes Africa as the ultimate playground, a place of warmth, belonging, and freedom. The warmth of that country is contrasted starkly with the cold of winter in America.

#### **Four Feet, Two Sandals** Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed 2007

When relief workers bring used clothing to the refugee camp, everyone scrambles to grab whatever they can. Ten-year-old Lina is thrilled when she finds a sandal that fits her foot perfectly, until she sees that another girl has the matching shoe. But soon Lina and Feroza meet and decide that it is better to share the sandals than for each to wear only one. As the girls go about their routines and watch for their names to appear on the list to go to America, the sandals remind them that friendship is what is most important.

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

Williams bases this fictional picture book on the harrowing, real-life experiences of a band of approximately 30,000 southern Sudanese boys, between the ages of 8 and 15, who walked nearly 1000 miles searching for a safe refuge. Eight-year-old Garang Deng, one of the leaders, tells his story and Tom an American who is helping in the camp spreads the news about the boys' plight, and when Garang is 21, the U.S. offers the Lost Boys a home. An afterword tells what happened once 3800 of the boys resettled in America.

#### **Ruby Lu, Empress of Everything** – Lenore Look 2007

Ruby Lu achieves her life's dream: to be a school "smile buddy." Assigned to help Flying Duck, her deaf cousin from China, acclimate to second grade, Ruby Lu takes her responsibility seriously. Unfortunately, she shirks her own duties as student, and both she and her cousin are assigned summer school for remedial work. Ruby Lu's feelings about her cousin's arrival from China fluctuate from loving to disliking to accepting. Look's portrayal of how immigration can strain a household is nicely handled, as are Ruby's humorous yet sincere endeavors to communicate with and help her cousin.

#### **The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story** Pegi Deitz Shea

Mai is a Hmong girl who lives with her grandmother in a Thai refugee camp, where she learns to embroider the pa'ndau, the story cloth that is an important source of income for the refugee women. She tells her story through her stitches.

#### **I Hate English** by Ellen Levine 1989

Mei Mei, a bright and articulate immigrant from Hong Kong, is having difficulty adjusting to the new language and culture at school in New York City. A sensitive teacher takes Mei Mei under her wing and succeeds in breaking through her fear of losing her identity.

#### **Candy Shop** – Jan Wahl

Daniel, an African-American boy dressed as a cowboy, and his aunt are off to do some shopping, including a visit to his favorite place, the Candy Shop. When they finally get to their destination, they find a crowd gathered and the Taiwanese owner, Miz Chu, in tears. Someone has written hateful words on the sidewalk in front of her shop. Daniel desperately wants to help and so he takes a bucket and brush and scrubs away those "dumb words."

#### **One Green Apple** – by Eve Bunting and Ted Lewin

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As a Muslim girl rides in a hay wagon heading to an apple orchard on a class trip, the dupatta on her head setting her apart, she observes that while some of the children seem friendly, others are not. Her father has explained, ...we are not always liked here. Our home country (never named in the story) and our new one have had difficulties. Later, when she puts a green apple into the cider press instead of a ripe red one as her classmates have done, they protest. But the cider from all their apples mixed together is delicious—a metaphor for the benefits of intermingling people who are different.

### **Going Home** by Eve Bunting 1998

Carlos, his parents, and his sisters visit the family village in Mexico. Mama and Papa are very excited, but the kids don't know what all the fuss is about. If they really love Mexico, what could be the point of leaving for America just for "opportunities"? Carlos later understands that for the love of their children his parents left their beloved home.

### **The Name Jar** by Yangsook Choi 2001

On the way to her first day of school, Unhei is teased by the children on the bus for her Korean name. When she reaches her classroom and is asked her name, she tells her classmates that she has not yet decided on one. To be helpful the children put their suggestions into a "name jar." Eventually the girl decides to keep her own name as one of her classmates takes pride in the new Korean nickname he has chosen, Chinku, meaning "friend."

### **Nadia's Hands** by Karen English 1999

Nadia, a Pakistani-American girl, is chosen to be the flower girl at her aunt's wedding. On the day of the ceremony, Auntie Amina applies a henna paste (mehndi) to the girl's hands and then draws intricate patterns on them. Nadia knows that the designs will not wash off by the time she goes back to school on Monday, and she is very concerned about what her classmates will think.

### **How Many Days to America: A Thanksgiving Story** by Eve Bunting 1990

A family flees its native country in the Caribbean as refugees in a small boat and lands in America on Thanksgiving.

### **The Lotus Seed** by Sherry Garland 1993

A nameless Vietnamese narrator tells of her grandmother who, keeps a lotus seed with her through war, flight, and emigration until one summer a grandson (the narrator's brother) steals it and plants it in a mud pool near the family's American home. Grandmother is inconsolable when the exact spot cannot be found. The following spring, a lotus grows from the mud puddle and in time the elderly woman gives a seed to each of her grandchildren, reserving one for herself. The narrator vows to plant hers one day, give the seeds to her own children, keep the tradition, and share her grandmother's memories.

### **A Day's Work** by Eve Bunting 1994

Francisco and his abuelo, grandfather, are looking for work as day laborers. Abuelo doesn't speak English, so Francisco joins him as translator. However, Francisco's desire for work leads to a lie, which causes trouble for him and his grandfather. In the end, Francisco learns a powerful lesson. Youngsters will also get a glimpse into the world of modern immigration and labor. The story touches on the difficulties the translating responsibility can pose for families.

### **America Is Her Name** by Luis Rodriguez 1998

Nine-year-old America Soliz is an illegal immigrant of Mexican-Indian heritage living in the violence-ravaged Pilsen barrio of Chicago. Feeling unwelcome in her new country, she yearns to return to her native Oaxaca. Then one day, a Puerto Rican poet visits America's ESL class and tells the students that

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"There's poetry in everyone...and poets belong to the whole world." Soon, America begins to express herself through poetry.

### **La Mariposa** – by Francisco Jimenez 2000

Francisco, the son of migrant workers, has difficulty adjusting to a new school because he doesn't speak or understand English and, to make matters worse, the class bully seems to have it in for him.

### **Jorge Is My Name On Both Sides of the River** by Jane Medina 2004

A collection of 27 insightful poems that illustrate the migrant experience from the point of view of a grade school child from Mexico. Jorge doesn't want to be called George. His struggles to fit in result in a friendship with a boy named Tim; a tentative coming to terms with American society; and some degree of sadness when, upon his grandmother's death, his family must cross the river again.

### **My Name Is Bilal** – by Asma Mobin-Udin 2005

Bilal and his sister, Ayesha, who are Muslim, start school in a new city. At first Bilal tries to blend into the largely non-Muslim environment, calling himself Bill and ducking out of sight when two boys try to pull off Ayesha's head scarf. Encouraged by a sympathetic teacher and his own faith, Bilal finds the courage to stand up with his sister the next time the boys tease her.

### **My Freedom Trip** – by Frances Park and Ginger Park 1998

The story of a young girl's escape from North Korea, based on the life of the authors' mother.

### **Leaving Vietnam: The Journey of Tuan Ngo, a Boat Boy** – by Sarah Kilborne 1999

Tells the story of a boy and his father who endure danger and difficulties when they escape by boat from Vietnam, spend days at sea, and then months in refugee camps before making their way to the United States.

### **Marianthe's Story: Painted Words and Spoken Memories** by Alike 1998

These two carefully written stories, combined in one book, show the difficulties a child faces when coming to a new land and the unique heritage each one of us has. In *Painted Words* Mari, starts school knowing no one and unable to speak or understand the language. She expresses herself and her feelings through her art. Finally the day comes when Mari is able to stand before the class with her paintings and tell her story with her new words, "page by painted page." Flip the book over for *Spoken Memories* as Mari tells her class what her life was like in her native land.

### **Speak English for Us, Marisol** by Karen English 2000

Marisol is the only member of her family who can speak English, and spends much of her time translating for her relatives and friends who cannot speak English. Ideal for bilingual children living in America. Full-color illustrations.

### **Peacebound Trains** by Haemi Balgassi 2000

Sumi's grandmother tells the story of her family's escape from Seoul during the Korean War, while they watch the trains which will eventually bring her mother back from army service.

### **Journey Home** by McKay 1998

Ten-year-old Mai describes the journey she and her mother make to Vietnam to find her mother's birth parents. They search at the People's Hall of Records in Saigon and visit many orphanages; but it is a kite, Lin's only possession when she was adopted by an American couple, that leads them to her identity. Mai

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herself, whose father left the family before she was born, comes to an understanding of what "home" really means.

### **Grandfather Counts** by Andrea Cheng 2003

When Helen's grandfather, Gong Gong, comes from China to live with her family, he's shocked to find that none of his grandchildren speak Chinese. How will he communicate with them? At first he keeps to himself. Then one day he joins Helen to watch the trains. He starts counting the train cars in Chinese, and she repeats the words. Then Helen says the numbers in English. They continue to teach each other, and Helen even learns her Chinese name, which means "flower."

### **Grandfather's Journey** by Allen Say 1993

Home becomes elusive in this story about immigration and acculturation, pieced together through old pictures and salvaged family tales. Both the narrator and his grandfather long to return to Japan, but when they do, they feel anonymous and confused: "The funny thing is, the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other." Winner of the 1994 Caldecott Medal

### **Halmoni's Day** by Edna Coe Bercaw 2000

Jennifer's grandmother is coming to visit just in time for her school's Grandparents' Day. At the airport, Jennifer is nearly as nervous as Halmoni, her Korean grandmother. Jennifer worries that Halmoni, who does not speak English and wears "strange clothes," will embarrass her during the class' Grandparents' Day. To her relief and surprise, Halmoni not only wins a prize as "the grandparent who traveled the farthest to get here," she charms the class with a family story.

### **Going Home, Coming Home** by Troung Tran 2003

Eight-year-old Ami Chi makes her first trip to Vietnam, her parents' homeland, and stays with her uncle and grandmother. The heat, the small house, and her inability to understand the language make the child long to return home to America-until she visits a market, makes a friend there, and develops a closeness with her grandmother. She realizes that "Home is two different places, on the left and right sides of my heart."

### **Faraway Home** by Jane Kurtz 2000

Desta's grandmother is ill in faraway Ethiopia, and her father must return to his native land to help out. As he cuddles his daughter on his lap, he describes the place of his birth. He tells American-born Desta of Ethiopia's beauty, but she hears only the differences-dinners cooked in a firepit, a night wind that is often "cold as old bones" and that carries with it the howling of hyenas. "Your home is too wild," she tells him. Besides, she worries that he might not come back.

### **The Trip Back Home** by Janet Wong 2000

The story tells about the excursion of a young American girl and her parent to stay with relatives in Korea. The child participates in daily routines such as heating the house with charcoal placed in a floor tunnel, feeding the pigs, going to the outdoor market, and playing cards-all in a warm, familial setting.

### **The Stars in My Geddoh's Sky** by Claire Sidhom Matze 1999

Alex relates what happens when his Geddoh (Arabic for grandfather) comes to the United States for a lengthy stay. Geddoh brings presents, shares knowledge about his Mediterranean homeland with his grandson, and spends happy days with him. All too soon, his visit draws to an end, but Geddoh reminds Alex that they will always share the sparkling canopy of the night sky.

### **Dear Juno** by Soyung Pak 1999

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A Korean-American boy living in the U.S. and his grandmother, who lives in Korea, communicate through letters that bypass their language barrier.

### **Apple Pie, Fourth of July** by Janet Wong 2002

This simply told story explores a child's fears about cultural differences and fitting in. A Chinese-American girl helps her parents open their small neighborhood grocery store. On the Fourth of July her parents just don't understand that customers won't be ordering chow mein and sweet-and-sour pork on this very American holiday. As she spends the day working in the store and watching the local parade, she can't shake her anxiety. When evening arrives along with hungry customers looking "for some Chinese food to go," she is surprised but obviously proud that her parents were right after all.

### **My Name Is Maria Isabel** by Alma Flor Ada 1993

Maria Isabel Salazar Lopez finds herself dubbed "Mary Lopez" when her family moves and she is placed in a class with two other Marias. Maria Isabel finds it hard to respond to a name that does not seem like hers. Her teacher doesn't understand why it is so difficult for her to answer to "Mary".

### **Love as Strong as Ginger** by Lenore Look 1999

When Katie accompanies GninGnin, her grandmother, to the crab cannery, she learns how long and hard GninGnin works as she cracks 200 pounds of crab meat a day and earns "enough for bus fare and a fish for dinner... and someday, maybe enough to help you go to college".

### **Coolies** by Yin and Soentpiet 2001

This picture book, cast as a story told by a modern Chinese grandmother, tells of the labor of the thousands of Chinese immigrants who helped build the transcontinental railroad. The boys expect a land of opportunity but discover discrimination from the tyrannical railroad bosses who call them "coolies."

### **The Color of Home** by Mary Hoffman 2002

Hassan, a recent immigrant from Somalia, is homesick on his first day of school in America. Though the teacher is nice and the children are friendly, adjusting to a new culture, especially a different language, is a struggle. When the teacher distributes art supplies, Hassan discovers a way to communicate. He paints two pictures-one to share the story of his life in Somalia, and another that depicts his hope for a bright future in his new home.

### **My Name Is Yoon** by Helen Recorvits 2003

This moving story depicts a Korean girl's difficult adjustment to her new life in America. Yoon, or "Shining Wisdom," decides that her name looks much happier written in Korean than in English. Still, she struggles to please her parents by learning an unfamiliar language while surrounded by strangers. Although her teacher encourages her to practice writing "Yoon," the child substitutes other words for her name. Calling herself "CAT," she dreams of hiding in a corner and cuddling with her mother. As "BIRD," she imagines herself flying back to Korea. Finally, she pretends she is "CUPCAKE," an identity that would allow her to gain the acceptance of her classmates. In the end, she comes to accept both her English name and her new American self, recognizing that however it is written, she is still Yoon.

### **Halmoni and the Picnic** by Sook Nyul Choi 1993

Yunmi, a Korean-American third-grader in a N.Y.C. parochial school, worries about her grandmother Halmoni, who's been in the US only two months and is having a hard time with the English language and American customs. When Yunmi's friends invite Halmoni to chaperone a class picnic and Halmoni insists on bringing special Korean food, Yunmi fears her classmates may turn up their noses at the kimbap or make fun of Halmoni's traditional clothing. But thanks to Halmoni's gentle, generous ways and the children's good-natured curiosity, the day is a great success.

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### **Hannah Is My Name** by Belle Yang 2004

A girl describes her family's journey from Taiwan to the United States in 1967, explaining that she must give up her Chinese name, Na-Li, and adjust to her unfamiliar American name. Hannah relates how she and her parents try to adapt to a new way of life, observing the strange customs that they encounter and detailing the obstacles that they all must face. The tension is in the threat of deportation as the family waits for green cards that will allow everyone to live freely in the U.S.

### **Lights for Gita** by Rachna Gilmore 2000

An immigrant child from India celebrates the Hindu holiday of Divali for the first time in her new home. In the November gloom of her new apartment, Gita longs for her extended family in New Delhi and the warmth she's left behind. She cries when an ice storm knocks out the power in all the buildings on her street; but with her parents and her best friend, she lights the *diyas* for the festival, and she comes to see that the lights of Divali can beat the darkness outside and the sadness within.

### **Waiting for Papá** by Rene Colato Lainez 2004

When the family's home in El Salvador burned down, five-year-old Beto and his mother moved to the United States. Unfortunately, his father could not get a visa and remained behind. Now, three years later, the boy still misses Papá terribly, and although his mother works with an immigration lawyer, she makes no headway. A class project and a resultant radio broadcast finally open the door to the long-awaited reunion.

### **I am Rene, the Boy** by Rene Colato Lainez 2005

In El Salvador, René feels confident, brave, and tough. Then he comes to the United States and must cope with a new culture and a new language. Dismayed when he learns that René is a girl's name, he feels better when he finds out that the feminine version is spelled with a double "e." An essay contest at school gives him a chance to put his research to good use and to celebrate both his name and his heritage.

### **Benjamin and the Word** by Daniel Olivas 2005

As Benjamin waits for his father to pick him up after school, he is oblivious to the beauty of the cloud floating overhead or to the noise of his schoolmates playing. Only one thing runs through his head—the hurtful word that his friend James called him at recess. His father points out that Benjamin is a wonderful mix of his own Hispanic heritage and the boy's mother's Russian-Jewish background. This insight enables the boy to return to school, confront James, secure an apology, and tell him not to call him names any more.

### **Good-Bye 382 Shin Dang Dong** by Frances Park 2002

An eight-year-old Korean girl moves to America with her parents. The story begins with Jangmi's last day at home—on the eve of monsoon season, filled with reluctant goodbyes—and her first day in her new country. It contrasts the landscapes and customs of the two cultures and shows the common anxieties of a child moving to a new place, from worries about making friends to the strangeness of new surroundings.

### **The Silence in the Mountains** by Liz Rosenberg 1999

Iskander and his family leave their beautiful mountain home when war erupts. Coming to America, they eventually settle on a prosperous farm where everyone adapts except for Iskander, who misses the silence of the mountains. Though all of the adults try to help him adjust, only his grandfather understands the nature of his homesickness and is able to show him what this new land has to offer.

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### Intermediate

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#### **Drita: My Homegirl** – Jenny Lombard 2007

Drita, 10, is a Muslim Albanian refugee from Kosovo and a stranger in her fourth-grade classroom. Maxie is African American, one of the in-crowd that wants nothing to do with the newcomer--until her social studies teacher charges her with interviewing Drita about her story. The girls find common ground which involves both families when Maxie's grandmother, a retired nurse, sweeps in to rescue Drita's mother who is suffering from severe depression.

#### **Pa Lia's First Day** – Michelle Edwards, 1999

Pa Lia's first day at her new school, Jackson Magnet isn't going so well. She doesn't know anyone there. She can't find her second grade classroom. But worst of all, she accidentally gets the only kids who have ever been nice to her in trouble. Will Pa Lia ever fit in? It doesn't discuss immigration directly but is about a Hmong student fitting in and making friends and it takes place in St. Paul, Minnesota.

#### **Three Names of Me** - Mary Cummings 2006

A girl adopted from China explains that her three names – one her birth mother whispered in her ear, one that her orphanage called her, and the one her American parents gave her – are each an important part of who she is. Includes scrapbooking ideas for other children adopted internationally.

#### **Who Belongs Here? An American Story** by Margy Burns Knight 1993

Nary, a 10-year-old boy from Cambodia. Accompanying his story of leaving his homeland and settling in this country is a parallel text, set in italics, that expands some of the ideas presented. Sometimes it provides background information on U.S. immigration or history; at other times it serves to stimulate discussion, particularly on such topics as intolerance and prejudice.

#### **Shanghai Messenger** by Andrea Cheng 2005

11 year-old Xiao Mei heads off to Shanghai, China, to visit their extended family. Xiao Mei is both excited and apprehensive. She will meet many new relatives, but will they accept her, a girl from America who is only half Chinese?

A story in verse of a biracial Chinese American girl's journey to self-discovery and love of family.

#### **The Trouble Begins**- Linda Himmelblau, 2005

After fleeing their native Vietnam and spending years in the Philippines recovering from TB, Du Nguyen and his grandmother have come at last to the United States to be reunited with his parents and siblings. The 11-year-old's life is filled with adjustments to his new family, school, language, and lifestyle. Du's perspective and story may help sensitize readers to the cultural and emotional hurdles facing many immigrant classmates. (Ages 9-12)

#### **Hello my Name is Scrambled Eggs**- Jamie Gibson, 1985

Seventh grader Harvey Trumble gets chosen to befriend Tuan Nguyen, when the Nguyen family moves to Pittsfield, Illinois, and stays with the Trumbles temporarily. Harvey gains insight and appreciation for what life as a refugee was like when Tuan reveals the details of the family's escape from the war raging in Vietnam. (Ages 9-12)

#### **Esperanza Rising** - Pam Munoz Ryan, 2000

This story is about a 13-year old girl's immigration from Mexico to the US and her move to a different social class. She unwillingly enters a world where she is no longer a princess but a worker. Set against the

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multiethnic, labor-organizing era of the Depression. It's an easy book to talk about and useful in classroom discussions. This well-written novel belongs in all collections. (Ages 9-13)

### **The Dream on Blanca's Wall / El Sueño Pegado En La Pared De Blanca: Poems in English and Spanish** – Jane Medina 2004

This free-verse collection portrays the life of Blanca, a sixth grader whose 24 poems outline the obstacles she faces: poverty, non-English-speaking parents, long absences from school to return to Mexico, and a much-loved but underachieving older brother who belittles her ambitions. They also address the sources of strength in her life: a loving family, concerned teachers, and a supportive neighborhood.

### **Honeysuckle House** – by Andrea Chang 2004

Born in Cincinnati, Sarah, 10, is Chinese American, but she doesn't speak Chinese and doesn't want to. She's furious when the teacher expects her to take care of the new kid, Ting, who has just arrived from Shanghai. Ting, who does know a little English, wishes she were back home, far from people who mock her accent and appearance. Told in the girls' alternating voices, this novel is certainly a friendship story, but it moves beyond the usual immigration-assimilation scenario to show the cultural differences across generations and inside families.

### **Little Cricket**- Jackie Brown, 2004

12-year-old Kia and her family escape the North Vietnamese soldiers and search for safety by traveling to Thailand. Eventually Kia, her brother, and their grandfather make their way to St. Paul, MN, where Kia finds friendship in her new home. A poignant and insightful story of learning to live in a new land. (Ages 11-14)

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## Middle School

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### **Home of the Brave** – Katherine Applegate 2007

Kek, a young Sudanese refugee, is haunted by guilt that he survived. He saw his father and brother killed, and he left his mother behind when he joined his aunt's family in Minnesota. In fast, spare free verse, this debut novel by nonfiction writer Applegate gets across the immigrant child's dislocation and loss as he steps off the plane in the snow. He does make silly mistakes, as when he puts his aunt's dishes in the washing machine. But he gets a job caring for an elderly widow's cow that reminds him of his father's herds, and he helps his cousin, who lost a hand in the fighting. He finds kindness in his fifth-grade ESL class, and also racism, and he is astonished at the diversity.

### **Someone like Summer** – M.E. Kerr 2007

Tall, blonde, blue-eyed Annabel, 17, is in love with Esteban, a Latino immigrant, who turns out to be part of an undocumented group of workers in her town in the Hamptons. Prejudice is rough from all sides, including the town's powerful benefactor, who targets the illegals, and Esteban's older sister, who calls Annabel "flour face" and thinks all white girls are loose. The main characters disturb all the stereotypes. Annabel's loving, gruff dad employs illegals because he can pay them less, and he treats them well even as he badmouths them--but no way will he allow Esteban to hook up with his daughter. One note: The assumption that the author makes about undocumented people being permitted to join the US military is a fallacy.

### **Crossing the Wire** – Will Hobbs, 2006

When falling crop prices threaten his family with starvation, fifteen-year-old Victor Flores heads north in an attempt to "cross the wire" from Mexico into the United States so he can find work and send money home. But with no coyote money to pay the smugglers who sneak illegal workers across the border,

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Victor must struggle to survive as he jumps trains, stows away on trucks, and hikes grueling miles through the Arizona desert.

### **Refugee Boy** – Benjamin Zephaniah 2001

Fourteen-year-old Alem Kelo adjusts to life as a foster child seeking asylum in London, while his Eritrean mother and Ethiopian father work for peace between their homelands in Africa.

### **Echoes of the White Giraffe** – by Sook Nyul Choi 1993

Fifteen-year-old Sookan adjusts to life in the refugee village in Pusan but continues to hope that the civil war will end and her family will be reunited in Seoul.

### **Necessary Roughness** by Marie G. Lee 1997

Chan and his sister Young move from Los Angeles to a small town in Minnesota with their parents who immigrated to the U.S. from Korea when the twins were small. Entering their junior year of high school, the siblings face numerous obstacles. They are the only Asians in town, and the fact that their mother and father practice many of the old-world Korean customs that clash with Chan and Young's more Americanized desires is paramount. Chan, who tells the story, finds refuge on the high-school football team, his practicing and playing experiences making up a large part of the book.

### **The Maldonado Miracle**- Theodore Taylor, 1973 (TV Movie 2003)

Twelve-year-old Jose Maldonado attempts to reunite with his father by crossing the border from Mexico to the United States. But things go terribly wrong. Jose's attempt to cross the border is harrowing, and his stay at a migrant worker camp turns into a nightmare, forcing him to flee for his life. A riveting story of faith and desperation. (Ages 9-14)

### **Something about America** – Maria Testa, 2005

Written as free verse poems in chapter format that together tell the story of a refugee from Kosovo and bring forth the story of the discrimination that resettled refugees faced in the town of Lewiston, Maine. This book would be an excellent accompaniment to the film "The Letter" about that issue. It is very short and could be read very quickly. It is very moving and shows how few words can capture much feeling.

### **The Composition** – Antonio Skármeta 2000

Pedro learns that his friend Daniel's father has been arrested because he is against the dictatorship. He remembers hearing the phrase "military dictatorship" on the radio, and he soon learns that his father is also against the dictatorship. Pedro is worried. Is his father going to be taken away? Is Pedro, himself, against the dictatorship? The next day, a representative of the government, Captain Romo, visits Pedro's school and invites the children in his class to write a composition. The student who writes the best composition will receive a gold medal and carry the flag in the Patriot's parade. The title of the composition is to be: "What My Family Does at Night." Excellent book to understand the push factors that lead to refugee movements and asylum seekers told from a young person's viewpoint.

### **Under the Same Sky** Cynthia De Felice 2003

While trying to earn money for a motor bike, 14-year old Joe Pedersen becomes involved with the Mexicans who work on his family's farm and develops a better relationship with his father. Joe also confronts the stereotypes that many of his friends hold about immigrants. He learns about the challenges facing undocumented immigrants and the broken immigration system through the experiences of friends.

### **Goodbye Vietnam** Gloria Whelan 1992

Goodbye Vietnam tells the story of Mai, a young Vietnamese girl, who is forced to flee her country and become a boat person. She tells us of her journey to Hong Kong, life in a refugee camp.

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### **Swimming to America** by Alice Mead 2005

Eighth grader Linda Berati struggles to understand who she is within the context of her mother's secrecy about her family background, her discomfort with her old friends, her involvement with the family problems of her Cuban-American friend Ramon and an opportunity to attend a school for "free spirits" like herself.

### **Journey of the Sparrows** - by Fran Leeper Buss 1991

Maria and her brother and sister, Salvadoran refugees, are smuggled into the United States in crates and try to eke out a living in Chicago with the help of a sympathetic family.

There they struggle to find work – cleaning, sewing, washing dishes – always fearful of arrest and deportation back to the cruelties of El Salvador.

### **The Clay Marble** by Minfong Ho 1991

Fleeing their war-torn Cambodian village in early 1980, twelve-year-old Dara and her family establish a makeshift home at a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border. Then shelling and fighting, inescapable even there, separate Dara from her family and she must overcome her fear and lack of confidence to find them again.

### **Mud City** – by Deborah Ellis 2003

Fourteen-year-old Shauzia dreams of seeing the ocean and eventually making a new life in France, but it is hard to reconcile that dream with the terrible conditions of the Afghan refugee camp where she lives. Her decision to leave necessitates Shauzia dress like a boy, to earn money to buy passage out.

### **Red Midnight** by Ben Mikaelson 2002

When guerrilla soldiers strike Santiago's village, they destroy everything in their path -- including his home and family. Santiago and his four-year-old sister escape, running for their lives. But the only way they can be truly safe is to leave Guatemala behind forever. So Santiago and Angelina set sail in a sea kayak their Uncle Ramos built, heading for the hope of a new life in the United States.

### **The Circuit** by Francisco Jiménez

This is a collection of short stories based on the life of the author, Francisco Jimenez, while he was growing up as the son of migrant farm workers in California. The story is historical fiction, set in the 1940's and details the travels of this Mexican family from Guadalajara, Mexico to the central California valleys where the abundant crops offer a livelihood to those people willing to travel to pick whatever crop is in season.

### **Breaking Through** by Francisco Jiménez 2001

*Breaking Through* begins where *The Circuit* ends. Jimenez chronicles his teenage years where, among other things, he and his family are caught by immigration officers and forced to leave their California home. Jimenez explores prejudice right alongside the universal teenage experiences of school dances and romances. (from Tolerance.org)

### **Red Bird of Ireland**- Sondra Gordon, 1983

Alderyn is only thirteen in 1846 when her father is unjustly accused of setting fire to the landlord's barn and must flee to America leaving the family behind. Her life takes on a new meaning now as she must stand up for herself and her family amidst the harsh conditions of the Great Potato Famine. (Ages 11-14)

### **The Crossing**- Gary Paulsen, 1987

## Literature with Immigration Themes

A story about an orphan struggling for survival on the streets of Juarez, Mexico, his encounters with an American soldier, and his efforts to cross the border. (Ages 11 and up)

### **Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story**- Pegi Deitz Shea, 2003

Mai, 13, is practicing her English in eager anticipation of leaving the crowded Thai refugee camp where she and her grandmother have lived for 10 years. Her parents were killed in Laos and her grandmother carried her across the river to Thailand. As their departure for America nears, Grandma is withdrawn and always stitching away at her pa'ndau (story cloth). While Mai yearns for the life her cousins write about, but her arrival in Rhode Island brings mixed reactions. (Ages 11-15)

### **The Other Side of Truth** - Beverly Naidoo, 2000

Eighth-grader Sade Solaja and her fifth-grade brother, Femi, are hastily stowed out of Nigeria after their mother is shot and killed by assassins' bullets meant for their outspoken journalist father. The children are abandoned in London and are unable to locate their uncle, a university professor who has been threatened and has gone into hiding. Picked up first by the police and then by immigration authorities, the youngsters remain silent, afraid to reveal their true names and background. They are placed in a foster home where kindness does not relieve their loneliness and alienation. School is a frightening plunge into Western culture, relaxed discipline, ethnic harassment, and peer intimidation. When their father, who has illegally entered the country, contacts them from a detention center, the children are jubilant. However, their excitement is overshadowed by his imprisonment and subsequent hunger strike. Their friends decide to support them and take action. (Ages 9-13)

### **Call Me Maria** – Judith Ortiz Chofer 2004

Maria's family has decided that she and her father will leave her mother in Puerto Rico and make a home for themselves in a New York City barrio. The vibrancy of her life is reflected in her growing friendships with Whoopee and Uma, two girls in her building, where her father is *el Súper*. Eventually, she becomes trilingual, speaking English, Spanish, and "Spanglish," though struggles with the difficulty of leaving her mother and homeland.

### **Lupita Manana** – Patricia Beatty 1992

Lupita must cross from Mexico to America. After her father dies in a fishing boat accident in the seas near their small Mexican village, Lupita's family is left in poverty. Lupita and her big brother, Salvador, must smuggle themselves into the United States to earn money to support their mother and young siblings.

America is not the land of opportunity they had hoped. A new language, hard labor, and the constant threat of *la migra* -- the immigration police--make every day a difficult challenge. But for feisty Lupita, there is always hope for a better manana -- tomorrow.

### **Song of the Buffalo Boy** – Sherry Garland 1994

A story about seventeen-year-old Loi, an Amerasian who must choose between her country Vietnam and the United States.

### **Children of the River** – Linda Crew 1991

The story of Sundara, who at 13 fled Cambodia to escape the Khmer Rouge army and left behind her parents, siblings, and childhood sweetheart. Four years after settling in the U.S., she finds it difficult to fit in at high school and balance Cambodian traditions with American culture.

### **Under the Persimmon Tree**- Suzanne Fisher Staples, 2005

## **Literature with Immigration Themes**

When her father and brother are taken by the Taliban and her mother and baby brother are killed in a bombing raid during the Afghan war in October 2001, Najmah begins an arduous journey across the border to Peshawar, Pakistan. There, she meets up with an American woman, Nusrat, who has been conducting a school for refugee children while she waits for her husband, Faiz, who has returned to his native country to open medical clinics. Staples brings the world of the refugee camp to life. (Ages 11-15)

### **Behind the Mountains**- Edwidge Danticat, 2002

Celiane's journal chronicles the family's departure from their homeland of Haiti to join her father, who had immigrated to New York City five years earlier. When Celiane, her mother, and her 19-year-old brother are finally approved to enter the U.S., the teen knows everything will be all right as soon as she sees her father, but there are the unavoidable frictions among family members, fueled not only by the separation and adjustment to a new country, but also by the natural maturing process that the children undergo. (Ages 11-15)

### **The Not So Spangled Life of Sunita Sen**- Mitali Perkins, 2005

When her (Eastern) Indian grandparents arrive for a year-long visit, eighth grader Sunita Sen feels caught between two cultures. Her Westernized upbringing is threatened when her parents adapt to their native Indian culture. Embarrassed by her heritage, Sunita withdraws from her classmates. Still, with great friends by her side, she begins to appreciate her grandparents' wisdom and values. In a cathartic moment, she discovers that her mother has been under pressure, too. (Ages 11-15)

### **Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from Refugee Camp to Harvard**

Mawi Asgedom, 2002

When he was four years old, Asgedom's family left their war-ravaged home in Ethiopia. They spent three years in a Sudanese refugee camp before coming to the U.S. in 1983, where they were settled by World Relief in a wealthy white suburb near Chicago. He later earned a full scholarship to Harvard, where in 1999 he delivered the commencement address. At the center of the book is his father, a fierce family disciplinarian, once an all-powerful medical assistant at home, now reduced to a "beetle," unemployed, half-blind, raging at his dependency. (Ages 9-13)

### **Finding Miracles**- Julia Alvarez

This is the story of a 15-year-old girl adopted from Latin America and the challenges she faces when she makes a friend and his refugee family who are from the same island country was born in. After elections in her birth country allow it, she is invited to visit the place of her birth by her friend's family. While there she falls in love and learns some things about herself. (Ages 12-16)

### **First Crossing: Stories About Teen Immigrants**- Don Gallo, 2004

Covering a wide range of cultural and economical backgrounds, these stories by 11 well-known authors touch on a variety of teen experiences. These selections will provide teachers with a wealth of material to use in multicultural literature units. (Ages 12-16)

### **Pocho**- Jose Antonio Villarreal, 1959

Villarreal illuminates here the world of "pochos," Americans whose parents come to the United States from Mexico. Set in Depression-era California, the novel focuses on Richard, a young pocho who experiences the intense conflict between loyalty to the traditions of his family's past and attraction to new ideas. (Ages 12-16)

### **An Island Like you: Stories from the Barrio**- Judith Ortiz Cofer, 1995

## Literature with Immigration Themes

Contemporary teenagers tell stories about immigrant kids caught between their Puerto Rican families and the pull and push of the American dream. The book shows that between the generations, there is tenderness and anger, sometimes shame. (Ages 12-16)

### **Before We Were Free**- Julia Alvarez, 2002

Anita de la Torre never questioned her freedom living in the Dominican Republic. But by her twelfth birthday in 1960, most of her relatives have immigrated to the United States, her Tío Toni has disappeared, and the secret police terrorize her family for their suspected opposition of the country's dictator. Inspired by her family's perseverance and immeasurable strength, Anita struggles to overcome her fears and to make a dramatic escape to freedom, leaving all she once knew behind. (Ages 12-16)

### **Shadow of the Dragon**- Sherry Garland, 1993

Danny Vo is a typical American teenager, concerned about obtaining his driver's license, finding a job, and getting a date with blonde, beautiful Tiffany Marie. At home, however, he must take the role of the elder son in a Vietnamese family. Tension increases when his older cousin Sang Le comes to stay with them in Houston. A former prisoner in a Vietnamese re-education camp and then a refugee in Hong Kong, Sang Le is overwhelmed in his new homeland. Bad grades and his inability to get a job cause him to take up with a Vietnamese gang. Just as Danny thinks he has gotten his cousin away from its members, Sang Le is tragically beaten to death by a group of white supremacist skinheads, one of whom is Tiffany Marie's brother. (Ages 12-16)

### **Tree Girl**- Ben Mikaelson, 2004

In her remote Guatemalan village, 14-year-old Gabriela is known as Tree Girl for her habit of fleeing to the forest and climbing high to escape the world. When guerrilla warfare comes to her area, her life is changed forever. Tree climbing saves Gabi from a massacre, and she is away from home when her village is destroyed. She flees to refugee camp where Her concern for others helps her recover from the trauma of her experiences. (Ages 12 and up)

### **A Step From Heaven**- An Na, 2001

Young Ju emigrates from Korea with her parents when she is four. A few months later, they live in a shabby apartment in Southern California, their family expanded to include a newborn baby boy. The parents work long hours at multiple jobs, and Young Ju struggles first to understand what is going on in school and then to be permitted to participate in typically American schoolgirl activities. The pressures of immigration, language difficulties, and oppositional cultural expectations causes the family to disintegrate. (Ages 13-17)

### **American Son: A Novel**- Brian Ascalon Roley, 2001

Roley details the Filipino immigrant experience through the troubled relationship of two brothers and their struggle to assimilate into the culture of Southern California. Gabe is the family peacemaker, while his older brother Tomas has adopted the Mexican gangster style. (Ages 13-17)

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## High School

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### **Refugees**- Catherine Stine, 2005

Stine follows an American and an Afghan teen's struggle to cope with the 9/11 tragedies. He tells an ambitious, haunting story that asks urgent questions about current conflicts, the human lives behind the headlines, and the healing that must follow. Afterward about post-9/11 Afghanistan and New York City close this timely, accomplished novel that teachers and teens will want to discuss together. (Ages 14-18)

## Literature with Immigration Themes

### **Somebody's Daughter** – by Marie Myung-OK Lee 2006

Nineteen-year-old Sarah was raised in Minnesota but born in Korea. She struggles with the reality of having two mothers: the one who gave her away and the one who adopted her. She enrolls in a yearlong exchange program at Chosun University in Seoul to learn Korean and discover her roots. In alternating chapters, readers learn about her birth mother, and about the circumstances surrounding Sarah's birth and adoption.

### **Enrique's Journey**- Sonia Nazario

When Enrique is five years old, his mother, Lourdes, too poor to feed her children, leaves Honduras to work in the United States. The move allows her to send money back home to Enrique so he can eat better and go to school past the third grade. Struggling in this new place, Lourdes is unable to return even after several years pass, leaving her son lonely and troubled. Longing to see her again, Enrique is determined to reach her in the US. This is the story of his dangerous travel through Mexico, which thousands of immigrant children make each year. (Ages 14-18)

### **Across a Hundred Mountains**- Reyna Grande, 2006

Juana, 11, loses her baby sister in a flood, and the death sets off a chain of tragic events: her money-strapped father heads north from their small Mexican town for *el otro lado*; Juana's newborn baby brother is claimed by the town money lender; and Juana's mother descends into alcoholism and violence. At 14, Juana leaves to look for her father, from whom they have heard nothing. On her painstaking journey, she meets Adelina Vasquez, an American runaway working as a prostitute in Tijuana, who takes Juana in. Their two stories cross and re-cross in unexpected ways, driving toward a powerful conclusion. (Ages 14-adult)

### **Because I Don't Have Wings** – Philip Garrison 2006

Garrison tells the stories of Mexican immigrants in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, by weaving together the centuries-old history of the immigrants' origins in Michoacan, their cultural and religious customs, and their struggle to keep these traditions alive. Garrison relates horrific tales of border crossings gone badly, but what he really wants to convey is the often hidden feelings of his friends who live a five-day drive away from their homeland.

### **Devil's Highway** – Luis Alberto Urrea 2005

So many illegal immigrants die in the desert Southwest of the U.S. that only notorious catastrophes make headlines. Urrea reconstructs one such incident in the Sonoran Desert, the ordeal of sun and thirst of two dozen men in May 2001, half of whom suffered excruciating deaths.

### **Macho!**- Victor Villasenor, 1991

MACHO details seventeen-year-old Roberto Garcia's journey from the state of Michoacán, Mexico, to his illegal entry into the United States. His backbreaking work in the vegetable fields of California and the workers' divided sentiments over César Chavez's efforts to unionize the workers are chronicled in a style that many critics have compared to John Steinbeck. (Ages 14-18)

### **Under the Feet of Jesus**- Helena Maria Viramontes, 1995

At the center of this powerful tale is Estrella. What she knows of life comes from her mother, who has survived abandonment by her husband in a land that treats her as if she were invisible, even though she and her children pick the crops of the farms that feed its people...from the aging but iron-bodied man who reluctantly becomes the head of the family, even as dreams of his youth in Mexico are calling him home...and from the endless highways and vast fields of California, where they travel and work together. (Ages 14-18)

## Literature with Immigration Themes

### **Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens**- Ted Conover, 1987

Conover lived among the people who pay “coyotes” enormous sums of money to be brought into this country secretly under conditions that are full of physical threat. Conover has done a good job of capturing the difficult lives of these men who want only to earn a decent wage to support their families. (Ages 14-18)

### **Pushed to Shore**- Kate Gadbow, 2003

In the mid-1980s, 35-year-old Janet Hunter leaves her tenure-track job at the University of Montana to devote herself to helping high school-age Hmong and Vietnamese refugees adjust to cacophonous American life. Divorced and lonely herself, Janet is sensitive to her students' concerns, encouraging them to write about their harrowing ordeals. (Ages 14-18)

### **When I was Puerto Rican**- Esmeralda Santiago, 1993

Santiago's memoir tells of her remarkable journey from the barrios of Puerto Rico to her graduation from Harvard University. A moving narrative of survival, *When I Was Puerto Rican* explores the universal immigrant theme of assimilation and its effects on family, culture, and identity. (Ages 14-18)

### **Almost a Woman**- Esmeralda Santiago, 1998

This sequel to the story of Santiago's childhood (*When I Was Puerto Rican*) covers her life as an adolescent and young woman when she lived in Brooklyn, New York, with her mother (Mami) and 10 siblings during the 1960s. Puerto Rican immigrants, the family suffered through periods of poverty exemplified by the author's trips to the welfare office with Mami, where she translated her mother's Spanish so that they could obtain benefits. (Ages 14-18)

### **High Wire Moon**- Susan Straight, 2001

A gritty portrait of poor Mexican immigrants and of low-life drug abusers in LA, softened by the boundless love of a mother for her daughter and a daughter determined to find her mother. Teens will encounter brutality and suffering here, but also a realistic picture of the struggles of illegal immigrants, of the horrors of migrant labor, and of a southern California far from the glitter and wealth of Hollywood.. (Ages 14-18)

### **The Tattooed Soldier**- Hector Tobar, 1998

The first novel from L.A. Times reporter Tobar is a gripping tale of revenge set on the lowest rung of L.A.'s social ladder, amidst the hardscrabble lives of illegal immigrants and the homeless. The fates of Guatemalan death-squad veteran Guillermo Longoria and traumatized, homeless refugee Antonio Bernal have been entwined since the day Longoria killed Antonio's wife and son in Guatemala. (Ages 14-18)

### **Born Confused**- Tanuja Desai Hidier, 2002

Dimple Lala has spent her entire life trying to fit in. In India, she is too American, while in America she feels unable to conform, largely because of her parents' efforts to educate and involve her in Indian culture. By her 17th birthday, she feels incapable of making anyone happy and is hopelessly confused as to where she belongs. (Ages 14-18)

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