



## Start the Conversation | Immigration & Refuge Activity Guide

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In this guide you will find a list of activities that can be used to continue the conversation and support the themes explored in Immigration & Refuge. These activities can be practiced at home, in the classroom, in childcare centers, at the park, or in other community spaces and can be modified to support a wide range of ages. Choose what activities you feel are best for you and the young people in your life!

### At Home Activities and Practices for Families:

- **Write Your Family Story**

Tell your story! Whether your family has immigrant origins or are natives of this land, tell the story of how your family came to be who and where they are! Using blank paper attached together to create a book, begin the task of creating your family story. Choose how far in the past you will begin. Perhaps you begin with your child's birth, your birth or your parents or their parents. Draw pictures, glue family photos, cut out images from magazines and newspapers that connect your story. When you get to the end, leave a blank page with the title "Our Family's Future" to symbolize all of the possibilities that lie ahead!

This activity gives young people the opportunity to take ownership of their story and can help grown-ups navigate conversations about immigration, home, family and legacy through creative play. While you create, encourage your child to ask questions about their story. And remember, if hard questions come up or you don't have all the answers, that's ok! Be transparent with them. Respond with the truth. Try these phrases: "I don't know, but maybe we can find/imagine the answer together" or "That is a tough question. Let me think about it and I will share an answer with you tomorrow morning at breakfast" or "What do you think?".

*Tip: In your book, include a page with a map to show where your family began, where they traveled to, where they landed and where you are now!*

- **Traditions & Routines**

When emigrating from a home country there can be a lot of traditions, routines and norms that get left behind. Whether you and your child have recently immigrated to a new country or you are welcoming a child who has, ask the child what traditions and routines they value from home. Perhaps there is a certain type of food, music or activity that they value and even miss. Make a list of these things and plan ways to honor these traditions and routines as often as possible. How can you bring the things about home/



## Start the Conversation | Immigration & Refuge Activity Guide

your place of origin that are valued into your new home/place of origin. It may help to place these traditions/routines on the calendar or somewhere where your child can see and look forward to them!

### Classroom Activities and Practices for Educators:

- **How Do You Say Hello?**

When working with children with immigrant or refugee experiences, it is crucial to validate the student's identities and diversities within the classroom. One of the ways you can do this is by honoring and including multiple languages and cultural practices in the classroom.

In my classroom, I begin each lesson with a hello song! There are countless hello songs to choose from and this activity can be adapted to fit any of them. In my class I sing...

*Look who's here it's (wave hand x 1)... Look who's here it's (wave hand x 1)...Look who's here it's (wave hand x 1)...Hello, Hello, Hello (wave hands x 3)*

If I have students in the class who speak languages other than English, I invite them to share how they say hello in that language. I also ask students to share other ways to nonverbally greet someone. For example, instead of waiving we might nod, bow, smile, shake hands, fist bump, etc. By inviting different languages and modes of greeting at the top of a lesson, it signals my students that all pieces of their identities (language, culture, ethnicity, race, etc.) are welcome and needed in the room!

Tips: How can you make space for this type of validation and inclusion in other parts of the day?

- **Welcome Routines!**

Entering a new space for the first time is hard! And it can be challenging to know exactly how to welcome someone. Rehearsing **welcoming** in the classroom can be a useful way to practice the skill in action. That way, when it comes time to greet someone new, your students know exactly what to do!

Prompt students to write a welcome letter to an imaginary new student. First they will write the letter. Then, they will imagine they are a new student and switch letters with a partner. You can have students respond to the letter they received imagining they are the new student. After each student has written, received and responded to a letter. Have a discussion about how this activity might help them welcome someone to the class and in



## Start the Conversation | Immigration & Refuge Activity Guide

other settings. This is an opportunity to practice empathy, communication skills, peer support and community building!

The letter prompts may look something like this...

Hello New Friend,

Welcome to CLASSROOM # at NAME OF SCHOOL!

My name is STUDENT'S NAME.

I like... 3 THINGS THIS STUDENT LIKES. What are some things that you like?

When I go to a new place for the first time I feel ...HOW THIS STUDENT FEELS WHEN IN A NEW PLACE . How are you feeling?

If I had just started at a new school, I would like it if...SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE THIS STUDENT FEEL WELCOME. Would you like that too?  
How can I help you feel welcome?

I am excited to get to know more about you and share more about me too!

Your Classmate,  
STUDENT'S NAME

- **Start the Conversation: Defining Key Terms & Providing Understanding**

There are a lot of negative implicit biases, assumptions and stereotypes made about immigrants and refugees in the United States and young people may have already internalized these thoughts. If a young person is of immigrant or refugee origin they may be thinking negatively about themselves and their experiences. Young people in communities with immigrant and refugee peers may also believe these negative thoughts and project them onto their peers. It is crucial for educators to make sure students have accurate information and are not relying on assumptions and stereotypes.

Some of the ways that educators can open up this dialogue and combat these biases are:

- **Define terms associated with immigration and refugee experiences.**  
Knowing what these terms mean can help give students language to engage in accurate conversation with one another. Some words may include:



## Start the Conversation | Immigration & Refuge Activity Guide

- Immigration
- Refugee
- Xenophobia
- Racism
- Discrimination
- Citizenship
- Undocumented
- Asylum Seekers

### Benefits to defining terms like xenophobia, racism, and discrimination:

Sometimes knowing there is a word to describe a sensation a child is feeling/something they have experienced can help create a container for the feeling and gives language to help them express what they are experiencing. If we can name it, it becomes easier to explore solutions and ways to regulate (process & manage) emotions.

- **Introduce a wide range of immigrant and refugee narratives.** Not all immigrants look the same, have the same country of origin, or speak the same language. Every immigrant story is different. Refugees come from all over the world for countless reasons. Find and introduce books, movies, articles, interviews, classroom visitors, speakers, games, and tv shows that widen student's perspectives of what an immigrant or refugee experience can look like.

Tip: Share names of celebrities and public figures with immigrant and refugee origins/ experiences!

- **Educate Yourself**  
If you are unfamiliar with immigrant and refugee experiences, politics and realities begin to grow your knowledge. This can give you confidence when supporting and educating your students on the topic. And if there is something you don't know the answer to, be honest! Try responding with: "I don't know. Let's research that together." Or "I'm not sure, how might we find an answer to that question?" Or "I don't know, maybe we should consult someone from that community?" See our [Start The Conversation: Immigration & Refuge Resource Guide](#) for sources!
- **Bring your students with immigrant and refugee origin into the conversation.** Check in with these students one on one to see how they are doing and what they might need. Ask how and when they feel included. Ask how



## Start the Conversation | Immigration & Refuge Activity Guide

and when they feel excluded. They are the experts of their experience, so use their expertise!

### References:

Hello Song by Helen Wheelock

Hello Song Language Adaptation inspired by Sindy Castro