

MY JOURNEY HOME: A THEME-BASED EXPLORATION

GRADES 7-12

SUBJECTS Social Studies (U.S History, World History, Geography, Historical Understanding, Behavioral Studies)

OVERVIEW Children of immigrants or refugees who have come to the United States often live in two different worlds—that of their parents’ and the one in which they have been raised. Sometimes, they experience an internal struggle to create a personal cultural identity. Reconnecting with their origins—homeland, family—is an important way of establishing a comfortable place in American society.

OBJECTIVES Students will:

- Identify and explain *My Journey Home*’s primary themes
- Analyze the film’s key figures
- Compare the key figures stories and actions
- Determine what an individual (immigrant/refugee) requires and should do to reconnect with his or her past

TIME NEEDED 2-3 classroom periods to view the film segments and 2-3 to complete the activities.

MATERIALS

- A copy of *My Journey Home*
- Television and VCR
- Chalkboard and chalk or chart paper and markers
- Theme Chart
- Character Analysis chart
- Print and online reference materials on the Vietnam War, Nigeria’s political dissension, and Mexican Americans, all within the context of immigrants and refugees

BACKGROUND America can be a fractured place – between and within ethnicities, immigrants versus American-born, and families splintered by circumstance, intolerance, or human frailties. Our great preoccupation as a people has been to find a way to mend these fissures or tear them apart even further. **My Journey Home** traverses this conflicted, cultural landscape through the perspective of new American voices known and unknown – author Faith Adiele; journalist Andrew Lam; and Armando Peña. All have experienced a childhood interrupted, coming of age in an America that is grappling with the dramatic changes of new immigration and racial and cultural diversity.

THE THEMES

The stories of [Andrew Lam](#), [Faith Adiele](#), and [Armando Peña](#) are linked by both personal and public history and themes, which cast a framework for **My Journey Home**:

- Each childhood was shaped by a historic moment in America's racial and cultural history: the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicano Movement, the Vietnam War.
- Each has seen how the forces of history intersected with personal conflict to rupture their homes and families.
- Each experienced the sense of alienation as a minority in an America still coming to grips with diversity.
- Each came of age in a milieu of constant motion and travel – which was a source of both trauma and discovery.
- Each came of age crossing boundaries – whether it was geographic borders of the Rio Grande or the Pacific Ocean – or those of race, ethnicity and identity.
- Each has tried to reconcile their past through their work. Lam is a writer and radio commentator; Armando Peña develops housing for the poor and his brother Carlos is a social worker with families along the border; Adiele is a writer.

TEACHING PROCEDURE

1. Post two sheets of chart paper—on one, write the word “journey;” on the other, “home.” Ask students to brainstorm associations with each term. Synthesize common threads among the ideas and concepts.
2. On another sheet of chart paper, write “My Journey Home.” Have students draw from ideas and concepts generated in Step 1 to discuss the likely essence of this phrase.
3. Note that some of the student reflections are themes or concepts expressed in **My Journey Home**, a film they will watch. Provide relevant background information to introduce them the film’s basic content and purpose. Show students the three film segments in the recommended timeframe. For each segment, distribute the following questions, to which students can either respond to in writing or use for discussion purposes.

Whose story has been featured?

What or who is at the heart of his or her “journey?”

What conflict does this individual (do these individuals) have with the past?

What does this individual (do these individuals) hope to accomplish by reconnecting with the past and/or reconciling with certain persons?

What steps does the individual (do these individuals) take to begin their journey?

What occurs during this individual's (these individuals') journey?

What is the impact of the journey on the individual(s)?

4. Divide students into small groups representing each film segment (perhaps 2-3 groups per featured individual). Distribute the *Theme Chart* and instruct students to list the film's primary themes. Have each group share its list.

5. Assign the groups an individual(s) and instruct them to complete the chart by noting how they personally negotiated the noted themes. For example, how did Adele handle racism (a theme) or finding her father (theme could be father's role or impact)? Invite groups to share their completed charts and draw comparisons among the featured individuals. What key messages do they convey about the immigrant/refugee experience in the United States?

6. Distribute the *Character Analysis* chart. (This is a sample and is modifiable.) Have the groups analyze their individuals by noting their qualities and how conversation, actions, narration, perception of others, thought processes, etc., reflect those qualities. (Students should add other characteristics for analysis.) Again, have students compare the individuals' varying qualities—what is the same and different?

7. Have students assume the role of, for example, an immigration counselor or advocate, a friend, a lawyer—somebody who might advise another about a journey to reconnect to the past. Based on the film's characters, their experiences, and their personal qualities, what advice might be offered? For example, what might people have to encounter when locating their origins? How would they prepare? Have students write and share their tips.

EXTENSIONS

Students can:

- Explore the refugee populations that have settled in the United States and compare their situations to those of immigrants.
- Research the Vietnam War, the political dissension in Nigeria, Operation Wetback, the history of Mexican immigration within the context of U.S. immigrants and refugees
- Recreate the stories of the individuals featured in **My Journey Home** by imagining what would have happened had they not reconnected with their pasts.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Mexican Americans:

PBS: My Journey Home

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/armando/armando_bg.html

PBS: The Border

<http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/index.html>

The Chicano Movement

http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/jmt81/myhomepage/

A History of Mexican Americans in California: The Chicano Movement

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views5e.htm

A History of Mexican Americans in California: World War II and its Aftermath

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views5d.htm

Mexican Immigration

http://library.ci.fort-collins.co.us/local_history/topics/Ethnic/mex-immigration.htm

Nigeria:

PBS: My Journey Home

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/faith/faith_bg.html

Nigeria: Chronology of the Struggle for Stability and Democracy

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200008240352.html>

Nigeria - A Country Study

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/ngtoc.html>

PBS: Nigeria - Facts & Stats

<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/nigeria/facts.html>

Vietnam:

PBS: My Journey Home

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/andrew/andrew_bg.html

PBS: Vietnam Online

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/>

PBS: Battlefield Vietnam

<http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/>

PBS: Country Profiles - Vietnam

<http://www.pbs.org/journeystoplanetearth/profiles/vietnam.html>

Armando Peña:

<http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/armando/>

Andrew Lam:

<http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/andrew/>

A Stranger in My Own Ancestral Village

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/andrew/andrew_stranger.html

Vietnam Diaspora

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/andrew/andrew_diaspora.html

Who Will Light Incense when Mother's Gone?

http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=8b694d5af2cc87958e3b20b30543f2f0

PBS: Re:Vietnam – Stories Since the War

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/>

PBS: Daughter from Da Nang – Living in Two Cultures

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/daughter/sfeature/sf_cultures.html

Faith Adiele:

<http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/faith/>

Fire: An Origin Tale

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/faith/faith_fire.html

My African Sister

http://www.pbs.org/myjourneyhome/faith/faith_sister.html

RELEVANT NATIONAL STANDARDS

United States History, from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel, at <http://www.mcrel.org/>) standards for grades 9-12:
27: Understands how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics
31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

World History, from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel, at <http://www.mcrel.org/>) standards for grades 9-12:
43: Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up
44: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world

Historical Understanding, from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel, at <http://www.mcrel.org/>) standards for grades 9-12:
2: Understands the historical perspective

Geography: Human Systems, from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel, at <http://www.mcrel.org/>) standards for grades 9-12:
9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface
10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics
12: Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes

Behavioral Studies, from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel, at <http://www.mcrel.org/>) standards for grades 9-12:
1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior
2: Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function
3: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

From classroom instructor to an executive director, Michele Israel has been an educator for nearly 20 years. She has developed and managed innovative educational initiatives, taught in nontraditional settings in the U.S. and overseas, developed curricula and educational materials, and designed and facilitated professional development for classroom and community educators. Currently operating Educational Consulting Group, Israel is involved with diverse projects, including strategic planning and product development.

THEME CHART

List *My Journey Home's* primary themes in the right column. In the left, note how the individual featured in your film segment handled circumstances reflecting the themes. Place the individual's name at the top of the right column.

KEY THEMES	NAME

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Name of Individual: _____

QUALITIES	ACTIONS	CONVERSATION	NARRATION	PERCEPTION OF OTHERS