



## Lesson: U.S. Immigration Policy Analysis

### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will explore how United States immigration policy affects families with mixed citizenship status. They will first discuss the challenges faced by a mixed-status family when U.S. immigration authorities schedule the undocumented parents to be deported. Students will also explain how the circumstances of such families could impact the United States politically, socially and economically. Finally, they will analyze public policies that address the needs of mixed-status families.

This lesson features a clip from the film **Sin País (Without Country)**, a documentary that tells the emotional story of a family with members of mixed citizenship status who separate when the undocumented parents are deported from the United States and their teenage children stay behind to continue their education.

For background information on immigration policy, please see the [Resources](#) sections of this lesson.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Discuss the challenges faced by a family with members of mixed citizenship status (seen in a film) when U.S. authorities schedule the undocumented parents to be deported.
- Explain how the circumstances of mixed-status families could impact the United States politically, socially and economically.
- Summarize public policies that addresses the needs of mixed-status families, including the positions of those for and against the policy.
- Develop personal positions on the public policies that they analyzed.
- Determine how the policies would impact the family seen in the film.

### GRADE LEVELS

6-12

### SUBJECT AREAS

Civics/Government, Current Events, Geography, U.S. History, Social Studies

## MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video, display a photo gallery and conduct research
- Handout: "U.S. Immigration Policy and Mixed-status Families" (PDF file)

## ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period

## FILM CLIP

Clip: "Separation" (length 6:48)

The clip begins at 4:57 with the text, "Sam and Elida decide to leave..." It ends at 11:45 with a shot of the parents on the computer screen during Helen's birthday party.

## ACTIVITY

1. Give each student a copy of the handout. Then, display a picture of the Mejia family from the Photo Gallery for the film **Sin País (Without Country)** on the POV website.
2. Review the sections of the handout titled "Vocabulary" and "Case Study: The Mejia Family" and discuss the dilemma that emerged when U.S. immigration authorities scheduled the Mejia parents to be deported: Should Sam and Elida move their children from the only country they have ever known to a new home in Guatemala where they will have fewer opportunities? Or should the family separate, with Gilbert and Helen staying in the United States to continue their education? Ask students to explain what they think the family should do and why.
3. Show the class the video clip "Separation" (length 6:48). Focus student viewing by having students take notes on how each family member seems to be affected by the deportation.
4. After watching the video clip, allow students to share their reactions to the Mejia family's situation and provide a few minutes for students to complete the three questions in the "Respond" section of the handout.
5. Tell students that an estimated 9.5 million people in the United States live in situations like that of the Mejia family, meaning that different members of the family have different types of citizenship status. Families that include U.S. citizen children and unauthorized immigrants are known as "mixed-status" families (Source: Pew Hispanic Center [<http://www.pewhispanic.org/>]). In the first half of 2011, U.S. immigration authorities deported more than 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen children. In some cases, parents are detained before deportation, while their U.S. citizen children are placed in the foster care system, where they face long-term or permanent separation from their parents (Source: Colorlines.com [[http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/11/shocking\\_data\\_on\\_parents\\_deported\\_with\\_citizen\\_children.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/11/shocking_data_on_parents_deported_with_citizen_children.html)]). Discuss how the circumstances of mixed-status families could impact the United States politically, socially and economically.
6. Have students research and analyze a current policy or piece of proposed legislation that addresses the needs of mixed-status families like the Mejias. Some possible options include:

- Obama Administration's Immigration Policy Change, June 15, 2012 ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june12/dreamact\\_06-15.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june12/dreamact_06-15.html)): Immigration authorities will stop deporting young illegal immigrants who entered the United States as children and allow them to obtain work permits if they meet certain requirements.
- DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act, H.R. 1842 (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr1842>): Would allow undocumented students with high school diplomas and GEDs to achieve permanent residency by either serving in the armed forces or attending college in good standing for two years.
- Child Citizen Protection Act, H.R. 250 (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr250>): Would allow an immigration judge to consider the best interests of a U.S. citizen child before deporting his or her parent.
- HELP Separated Children Act, H.R. 2607 (<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr2607>): Would allow parents detained by U.S. immigration authorities to communicate with their children, arrange for their children's care and participate in family court hearings.

7. Instruct students to work in pairs to research details of their selected policies or bills and then complete the "Immigration Public Policy Analysis" segment of the handout.

## EXTENSIONS

1. Examine whether commonly-held beliefs about immigrants are accurate. Have small student groups read and discuss the Immigration Myths and Realities ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/madeinla/special\\_02.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/madeinla/special_02.php)) page on the POV website. For each myth, ask students to discuss its possible origin, who benefits from the myth and how greater awareness of immigration realities might influence public opinion and policies. Consider giving extra credit to students who use social media to debunk a myth and share accurate information on immigration with their families and friends.

2. Look more closely at the impact that is made on families when undocumented parents are deported. First, have students identify the Risks Seen for Children of Illegal Immigrants ([http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/21/us/illegal-immigrant-parents-pass-a-burden-study-says.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/21/us/illegal-immigrant-parents-pass-a-burden-study-says.html?_r=1)). Then, ask them to review the Executive Summary of the report Shattered Families (<http://arc.org/shatteredfamilies>) and create an online slideshow that presents the research findings on the plight of mixed-status families. Do these findings influence students' positions on the public policy they analyzed in the main activity of this lesson? If so, how? If not, why not? What other public policies may be needed to address this immigration issue?

3. Debate whether undocumented parents of U.S. citizen minors should be deported. Divide the class into debate teams and have students research their sides of the issue. A good starting point is ProCon.org's arguments on this topic

(<http://immigration.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000775>). Students should also consult other sources and current public discourse, including the positions on immigration policy held by political candidates. Prompt the teams to include points in their arguments that illustrate how such deportations would positively or negatively affect the United States politically, economically and socially.

4. Investigate the demographics of modern immigration in the United States. Begin by using the Immigration Explorer map provided by *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/03/10/us/20090310-immigration-explorer.html>) to determine the percentage of foreign-born groups in your county or in another area you have studied in class. Use the timeline slider at the top of the map to find data and populate a chart that tracks the percentage of foreign-born groups in your selected area's population over time. What factors may have motivated these groups to settle there when they did? Have students conduct research to find evidence to support their theories and then summarize their findings in writing.

5. Explore other POV and PBS films related to separated families, Guatemalans and stories of immigration and deportation. Typically, video, background information and classroom activities are provided online for each film.

- *Last Train Home* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/lasttrainhome/>) tells the story of a Chinese family living apart: The parents work factory jobs in the city and the children are raised by relatives in the village.
- *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/granito/>) documents the fight for justice following a brutal genocide in Guatemala.
- *Made in L.A.* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/madeinla/>) shows Latina immigrants working in Los Angeles sweatshops and organizing themselves to obtain labor protections.
- *Lost in Detention* (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/lost-in-detention/>) examines the Obama administration's get-tough immigration policy.

## RESOURCES

### **U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.)**

<http://www.ice.gov/>

This government organization is an arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that seeks to “promote homeland security and public safety through the criminal and civil enforcement of federal laws governing border control, customs, trade and immigration.”

### **National Conference of State Legislatures: Immigrant Policy Project**

<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/immig/state-laws-related-to-immigration-and-immigrants.aspx>

This site provides regular reports on state laws that address immigration issues.

### **Pew Hispanic Center**

<http://www.pewhispanic.org>

This site presents statistical research related to the experiences of Latino immigrants in the United States.

### **Wharton Business School: America's Growing Hispanic Population**

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2758>

This April 2011 article discusses the potential impact of the growing Hispanic community on the United States.

## **STANDARDS**

### **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects**

(<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/>)

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

RH.9-10.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

RH.11-12.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

RH.11-12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RH.6-8.8. Distinguish among fact, opinion and reasoned judgment in a text.

RH.9-10.9. Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

RH.11-12.9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

WHST.6-8.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

WHST.9-10.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

WHST.6-8.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

WHST.9-10.8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**Content Knowledge:** (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Civics, Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Civics, Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy.

Civics, Standard 24 : Understands the meaning of citizenship in the United States, and knows the requirements for citizenship and naturalization.

Geography, Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Geography, Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Language Arts, Standard 7: Uses skills and strategies to read a variety of informational texts.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.