

# Daughters of Immigrants: Poetry, Spoken Word, and Collage Essays

Lisa Yuk Kuen Yau, 邱玉娟

Francis Scott Key Elementary School

## Abstract

This unit titled *Daughters of Immigrants: Poetry, Spoken Word, and Collage Essays* features the works of women poets with immigrant or refugee backgrounds, and aims to challenge middle year students (5th to 8th graders) to analyze how multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a poem as they study the immigration factors, political conflicts, and cultural barriers in our global world. Students will focus on the essential question: How to analyze and create poems through juxtaposition of texts, spoken words, and visual images? The unit will focus student learning on the social constructs and meanings of terms such as home, name, national identity, otherness, border crossings, and the return to one's birthplace.

The unit addresses the 5th grade English Language Art Common Cores Standards on the Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for literature and informational text (RL.5.7 and RI.5.7), Writing (W.5.10), and Speaking (SL.5.1.C), and also the 5th grade Pennsylvania Social Studies Standards on the Human Characteristics of Places and Regions (PA.7.3.6), and the Causes of Human Movement (PA.7.3.6.A.2).

**Keywords:** women immigrants, women refugees, daughter of immigrants, poetry, spoken word, literary collage, national identity, border crossings.

## Daughters of Immigrants: Poetry, Spoken Word, and Literary Collage Essays

Lisa Yuk Kuen Yau, 邱玉娟

Francis Scott Key Elementary School

Did our mothers invent loneliness  
or did it make them our mothers?  
Were we fathered by silence  
or just looking to explain away this gaping quiet?<sup>[1]</sup>

~ Safia Elhillo, 2016

Excerpt from her spoken word *Alien Suite*

At home, she is one.  
Outside, she is another,  
Who to be, when?  
The question will always remain,  
For she is the immigrant's daughter.

But she is not the only one,  
Who secretly leads two lives.  
Her parents who grew up,  
In a land, the daughter no longer calls home.  
Must now learn the culture of another,  
In a land, they must learn to call home.<sup>[2]</sup>

~ Maitri Patel, 2018

Excerpt from her poem *The Immigrant's Daughter*

In this unit, *Daughters of Immigrants: Poetry, Spoken Word, and Collage Essays*, I'm interested to explore how to bring together memories of immigrant and refugee women and their experiences with teaching strategies like close reading, speaking, drawings, mapping, and creative writing. As a daughter of an immigrant myself, I understand the importance of reading a diverse literature to help young readers like my fifth graders to gain greater self-awareness, better understanding of the world, and expand students' learning to increase their empathy of others, in this case, immigrant and refugee women in the United States. In addition, many of the struggles that immigrants and refugees face are also experienced by youths everywhere as they contend with their own isolation, self-doubt, emotional dislocation, and the search for belonging.

### Rationale

Professor Gerald Campano's TIP seminar, *Children's Literature and the Immigrant Experience*, sparks my interest to investigate and envision a literary curriculum unit to spotlight and increase the visibility of female writers and women immigrants. At the same time, I want to magnify the necessity of an inclusive teaching approach and model in order to maximize the wealth of knowledge coming from the diverse student identities in my 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. In this unit

on poetry, students are encouraged to use the juxtaposition of texts, spoken words, and visual images learned to create their own personal narrative? Furthermore, I want to address questions such as: 1) How poetry represent, misrepresent, and/or erase the experiences of women immigrants in the history of the United States? 2) What are the journeys like for women immigrants compared to those of men immigrants during the last 20 years? 3) Since the years 1790, 1882, 1924, 1948, and 1965 were important turning points in U.S. immigrant history and policies, what global and national events influence the change in attitudes toward women immigrants?<sup>[3]</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, future immigrants and their descendants are projected to account for 88% of the U.S. population (about 103 million people), as the nation grows to 441 million people from 2015 to 2065.<sup>[4]</sup> Most literary curricula in the United States lacks content richness and innovative teaching approaches to excite all students (immigrants and non-immigrants) to see themselves as global citizens in the world community.

As a daughter of immigrants from Hong Kong, I know first-hand of my own immigrant story from a woman's perspective. I would like to include my personal and my parents' stories as a narrative example. I can't write as a historian about my late mother's journey from the China to Hong Kong. But I can write as an educator about her journey through my memory of her oral storytelling with listening heart and eager ears. Be mindful that her voice is in Chinese as I recall her experiences: How she was then 16, poor, alone, and scared, on a boat for a night travelling from the mainland to a little island called Hong Kong. I don't believe she was a freedom swimmer, but a girl holding on for her dear life, swiftly in the South China Sea to then-British colony of Hong Kong. I remember how she detailed a flashback of her mother's (my grandmother's) oral telling of their hiding in the mountains away from the Japanese invasion. My mother recalled herself as a baby, crutched on her mother's lap and silenced with her mother's hand over her mouth. The years 1957, 1962, 1972 and 1979 marked the four major booms in illegal emigration from China to Hong Kong; Chinese in the Mainland were suffered greatly from the Cultural Revolution which contributed one of the deadliest famines and man-made disasters causing an estimated death toll of 15 to 55 million people from 1958 to 1962.<sup>[5]</sup>

In contrast, my own journey from Hong Kong to the United States seems like a luxury, on board a Boeing 747 giant airplane accompanied with my mother and my younger brother. My mother dressed the three of us in the same pink button-down shirts, red pants and striped belts, even our haircuts resembled each other: short, black, and neatly combed back. When we arrived at the JFK airport in New York, we were reunited with my father after his three years absence from my and brother's life. For those three years, my father went from being undocumented to being sponsored by a Chinese restaurateur to getting his green card to being able to save enough money bring my mother to the United States for two years, and then legally brought my brother and me over to live in the heart of Philadelphia Chinatown. Our first apartment was located on 11th and Arch Streets above an electronic store, now part of the Pennsylvania Convention Center. For that drive from New York to Philadelphia, the image of the Statute of Liberty in the rear-view mirror remains forever imprinted on my eleven-year-old self.

### *Why Focus on the Poetry of Immigrant Daughters?*

My reasons are twofold. First, poetry gives all people of all ages the choice to express themselves, voice their concerns and advocate for social change without the conventional rules

and restrictions of Standard English. Daughters of immigrants and women writers are almost invisible in my district curricula. Because immigrant children are the hopes and dreams of their parents' sacrifices, they grow up fast with responsibility to take care of their family. The pressure often makes children of immigrants more vulnerable to mental health issues and silent suffering. This unit highlights the multitude of women immigrants and the diversity of their voices, and at the same times present them in a complex form of sisterhood and solidarity. In my opinion, the plight of middle school students struggling with identity issues and finding their voice in the world is very similar to the struggle of immigrant daughters.

Secondly, I want to put women poets and women immigrants center-stage rather than a side notes of male writers, especially since my 5th grade ELA curriculum for the school year 2024-2025 does not include a unit on poetry. The first novel in my new 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELA curriculum is the book *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan featuring a female protagonist as the only daughter of a wealthy Mexican parents fleeing to California with her mother after her father's murder in the 1930s. While the book *Esperanza Rising* captures an immigrant daughter's perspective, poems from my unit features contemporary writers and their works (most selective poems are written in the 2020s), almost 100 years after the horrific Mexican Repatriation deporting an estimate of 300,000 to 2 million (where an estimated 50% of those deported was U.S. citizens, mostly children).<sup>[6]</sup>

The complexities of growing up in an immigrant household are multifaceted. In her poem, *the children of immigrants* (the title is intentionally written in lower cases by the poet), the poet Lenelle Moise eloquently captures the complex phenomenon: "*The children of immigrants don't get to be children. We lose our innocence watching our parents' backs bend, break. I am an old soul because when I am young, I watch my parents' spirits get slaughtered.*"<sup>[7]</sup> Many children of immigrants feel hopeless and alone in their thoughts, and through their built-up trauma and pressure, they may show signs of high anxiety and stress. It has been proven that the children of Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Latinx immigrants have higher rates of depression, anxiety and stress compared to the children of White European immigrants.<sup>[8]</sup> Trying to fit in and function in a country where a family has no significant history causes children to experience hardship from the constant translation of a completely different culture to their parents.

### **My School Demographic**

Currently, I teach 5th grade at the Francis Scott Key School in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The school serves students from K to 6th grades. My school demographics are a highly diverse community with a wide range of cultural and language backgrounds. The languages spoken by this diverse group of multilingual students, teachers, administrators, and parents include: Arabic, Burmese, Chinese, French, Hindi (India), Indonesian, Italian, Karen (Myanmar and Thailand), Khmer (Cambodia), Korean, Laos, Malays, Nahuatl (Aztec/Mexica), Nepali, Pashto (Afghanistan and Pakistan), Poqomchi (Guatemala), Q'eqchi'(Central America), Spanish, Swahili, Thai, Vietnamese, and other Indigenous languages. For the school year 2023-2024, the 5 most spoken languages at Key School are in this order: Spanish, Khmer, Burmese, Urdu, and Mandarin. The emerging languages are Urdu (Pakistan) and Arabic (Algeria).

According to U.S. News and World Report, in 2023-2024, my school has an enrollment of 402 students: 91.8% Minority Enrollment, 50/7% Hispanic, 32.3% Asian, 8.2% White, 6.7% Black, and 2% Multi-Racial; the student population is made up of 43% female students and 57% male students.<sup>[9]</sup> My school provide services for about 300 ESOL students, about 75% of the student body, about 5% had exited out of ELL services, and 10% are children of immigrants who are American-born (these students are NOT classified to receive English Language Learners (ELL) services, even though a language other than English is primarily spoken at home).<sup>[10]</sup> That's an estimate of 90% of the student body is recent immigrants and/or children of immigrants. Based on the 2023 Pennsylvania state test, only 3% of students are either advanced or proficient in math, and only 12% in reading.<sup>[11]</sup> According to Niche.com, the median household income is \$65,307, median rent is \$1,375, and the median home value is \$236,407 for the neighborhood of my school.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Content Objective

### *Background of U.S. Immigration and the Struggles of Women Immigrants*

Arguably, all people in the U.S., except for the Native Americans, are technically immigrants. The human species is migratory. Most people in the United States can trace at least part of their ancestry to an immigrant, either centuries ago or recently. An immigrant can be defined as someone who moves to a country from another country, which their descendants if born in the U.S are not. Europe is the largest continent that Americans trace their ancestry to, and many claim descent from various European ethnic groups. The Spaniards were the first Europeans to establish a continuous presence in what is now the continental United States in 1565.

Another perspective to consider is the question: Who were the first people to cross the oceans to America? What if Africans were the first immigrants, and they arrived in America centuries before Columbus and the slave trade? According to Leo Weiner in his work titled *Africa and the Discovery of America* (originally published in 1922), Columbus wrote in his journal that the Native Americans told him “black skinned people had come from the south-east in boats, trading in gold-tipped spears.”<sup>[13]</sup> Native Americans described the gold spearheads as “guanin”, which means “gold” in the Mandinka language – a language of the Mali Empire.<sup>[14]</sup> African skeletons were discovered in America and studies show that the skeletons are from the 13th century, most likely related to the sea voyages sent by Mansa Abu Bakr, the fifth Mansa (King) of the Mali Empire.<sup>[15]</sup> Because history is written from a Eurocentric perspective, this type of discussion about these evidences are not in history books and definitely not taught in schools.

The United States hosted, by far, the highest number of immigrants in the world in 2020 with over 50 million people born outside the country.<sup>[16]</sup> Germany and Saudi Arabia followed behind at around 16 and 13 million, respectively.<sup>[17]</sup> People immigrate to the United States for different reasons, and these reasons can be conceptualized as “push” and “pull” factors. Push factors force people to leave their country, and they often include civil wars, political corruption, natural disasters, gender inequality, religious prosecution, and lack of job opportunities, healthcare and education. On the other hand, pull factors attract people to move to a new country. Some common pull factors may include better work opportunities, greater security, and access to

healthcare and education. In general, the U.S. government accepts legal immigration for five major reasons: work, school, family, safety, and encouraging diversity.

"Foreign born" and "immigrant" are used interchangeably and refer to persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, people on certain temporary visas, and unauthorized immigrants. A foreign-born person who comes to America as an adult, they are referred to as a first-generation immigrant. The second-generation refers to those with at least one foreign-born parent. The third-and-higher generation includes those with two U.S. native parents. Most children of immigrants are second generation. But, if they migrate to the U.S. when they were children or adolescence, they are called generation 1.5.

Regarding women immigration, about 51% of all U.S. immigrants in 2022 were female.<sup>[18]</sup> Over the past four decades, female immigrants tend to slightly outnumber men and boys. Currently, approximately 21 million female immigrants live in the United States, making up 13% of the nation's female population; immigrant women come from all over the world, with the largest shares from Mexico (25.6%), the Philippines (5.3%), China (4.7%), and India (4.6%).<sup>[19]</sup> Both non-U.S. citizen females and U.S. citizen females were found to have more positive ratings of cultural acceptance, acquisition or exposure to a new language, travel, and interest in going into an international career in the future and were less prone to stereotypes.

In general, the adult children of immigrants in the U.S. (i.e., second-generation adults) tend to be much more highly educated than their parents. Almost all (93%) second-generation adults age 30–39 are high school graduates, compared to only about two-thirds (65%) of immigrant parents age 60–69.<sup>[20]</sup> While second-generation adults are also more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than their parents' generation (36% vs. 28%), they are less likely to do so than other U.S. born adults (48%).<sup>[21]</sup> These data support the need for more targeted efforts to increase college access and completion among immigrant students who would be the first in their families to earn a bachelor's degree.

One of many challenges of being an immigrant child is developing a healthy sense of belonging, commitment, attachment, and love for their second homeland and culture. The psychological realities often result in immigrants feeling rootlessness, loneliness, and grief for its first culture. but also in some positive ways, an increased ability to interact with people from many different cultures. Cross-cultural kids (CCKs) may be immigrants, refugees, international adoptees, children of biracial or bicultural parents. An immigrant kid has legal status in the country where their family now lives. In contrast, Third Culture Kids (TCK, Ruth Hill Useem, 2011) live in a country they know they will leave, and may not have the option to stay. This "unrequited love" from the second homeland is a feeling immigrant kids may well be able to deeply sympathize with, but do not share. Both may share the experience of being seen as "foreign" in a place they love and are very familiar with – but TCK don't often deal with being seen as "foreign" in a country that legally recognizes them, unless they have the intersectional and cross-cultural identities such as being part of a minority group. Today, in media and in popular culture, the TCK continue to be lauded—Barack Obama, who spent some of his childhood in Jakarta, Indonesia, is sometimes recognized as the U.S.'s most successful TCK—while immigrant children are often portrayed as potential terrorists or economic burdens on the system.

## *How Did Border-crossing Become a Crime in the United States?*

Migration is a human act that pre-dates laws. Asian immigrants were probably the first group of people to be seen as “illegal” immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a law that bans Chinese immigrants from entering the United States for 10 years.<sup>[22]</sup> A few decades later, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917 that established an “Asiatic Barred Zone” banning almost all immigration from Asia. Chinese, Asian Indians, Burmese, Thai, and Malays were on the exclusion list, but Japan was not because prohibitions against Japanese immigrants were already in place, nor is the Philippines, as it is a U.S. territory.<sup>[23]</sup> The U.S. could deport unauthorized migrants, but it couldn’t prosecute them legally until the Section 1325 Act in 1929 criminalized undocumented immigration for the first time with the aim to decrease Mexican immigration during the Great Depression.<sup>[24]</sup>

Immigration has been a contested public policy issue at various points in U.S. history, and has been elevated to a top concern for the public amid recent record encounters of asylum seekers and other migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. High numbers and sustained arrivals through various pathways, including legal avenues, have caused a strain on the immigration system, as well as on municipal services in key U.S. cities and towns that have become leading destinations for recent arrivals. Yet other communities, though, are welcoming immigrants, seeing them as sources of demographic, economic, and civic vitality.

## *Immigrant Students as Cosmopolitan Intellectuals and National Identity*

With the advance of globalization and the increased access of world travel and communication through social media, thinkers like Gerald Campano and Maria Paula Ghiso advocate using a different model for a literary curriculum to respect “immigrant students as cosmopolitan intellectuals” rather than students of deficits, language barriers, and troubles being American.<sup>[25]</sup> The political system based on the nation-state has become obsolete and that is time to design a better and more efficient alternative in order to maximize individual freedom and opportunity for all. Cosmopolitanism is also the idea that all people are world citizens of a single universal community. The ancient Chinese philosopher Mozi ((Chinese: 墨子, ca. 475-395 BC) inscribed: “universal love and mutual benefit” could be attained when a person “regard[s] other people’s countries as one own.”<sup>[26]</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist coins the idea of “Interbeing” as a way of living one’s life in relation to others, a word comparable to the interconnectivity of cosmopolitanism.<sup>[27]</sup> An international organization called *The Venus Project* aims to spread cosmopolitanism with the teaching of human interdependence while rejecting man-made artificial borders that currently separate people into nation-states.<sup>[28]</sup>

Nationalism treats the individuals as having relations to the nation-state, excluding one’s tie as part of the global community. The sociologist Ulrich Beck (May 15, 1944 – January 1, 2015) posed a new concept called cosmopolitan critical theory. Cosmopolitanism sees global capital as a possible threat to the nation state and places it within a meta-power game in which global capital, states and civil society are its players. It is important to mark a distinction between Beck’s cosmopolitanism and the idea of a world-state that imposes a single order on the world with hegemony, ethnocentricity, and elite ideals. Contemporary political and sociological

cosmopolitanism rests on the following fundamentals: Acknowledging the otherness of: people who are culturally different, people who have different rationalities as well as respecting future ideals, phenomena in nature, and other states of objects.<sup>[29]</sup>

*Poem Selection from YouTube Spoken Word and the Book "Ink Knows No Borders"*

Pairing #1: "Home" by Warsan Shire, British-Somali, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo&t=206s>) and "Home" by Safiya Sinclair Jamaican, *Ink Knows No Borders*, pp. 133-134

Pairing #2: "Pronounce Us Correctly" by Muna Abdulahi, Somali-American poet and child of refugees ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh\\_NB67o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh_NB67o)) and "On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance" by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, *Ink Knows No Borders*, p. 25-26.

Pairing #3: "If They Come For Us" by Fatimah Asghar, South Asian American poet, director and screenwriter (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B74J-cQ8-zg&t=1s>) and "The Break-In" by Hafizah Geter, Nigerian American writer, poet, and literary agent born in Zaria, Nigeria, and raised in Akron, Ohio, and Columbia, South Carolina, *Ink Knows No Borders*, pp. 27-28.

Pairing #4: "Alien Suite" by Safia Elhillo, Sudanese-American ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_fkhC\\_FLUDA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fkhC_FLUDA)) and "self-portrait with no flag" also by Safia Elhillo, *Ink Knows No Borders*, pp.138-139

Pairing #5: "At the Wall" by Paola Gonzalez and Karla Gutierrez, Mexican-American poets (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loHz2oQhLEI>), and "Dear America" by Sholeh Wolpe, *Ink Knows No Borders*, pp. 10-11.

Pairing #6: "Return" by Valeen Jules, from the Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw nations ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT6l\\_O6GvAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT6l_O6GvAY)) and "Return" by Gala Mukomolova, *Ink Knows No Borders*, pp. 122-123

*Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience*

*Ink Knows No Borders* is a book collection of 64 poems curated by two women publishers: Alyssa Raymond and Patrice Vecchione with a foreword by Javier Zamora (he crossed the border by himself at the age of nine), and an afterword by Emtithal Mahmoud (she was the 2015 World Poetry Slam Champion and a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador who traveled to refugee camps in Kenya, Greece and Jordan for refugee advocacy).<sup>[30]</sup> This book of poetry addresses a multitude of issues confronting immigrants and refugees, which include homesickness, cultural and language differences, human rights, national identity, exclusion, and the return to one's origin. Readers are encouraged to honor their own roots, explore new paths of discovery, develop more empathy for those who are struggling to overcome systemic discrimination. Brief biographies of the poets are included after the Afterword and Acknowledgment. In this collection, 39 out of the 62; poet are authored by the female voice. I think it is important to list all 39 women poets here to reserve their rights to be recognized as important writers: Elizabeth Acevedo, Samira Ahmed, Hala Alyan, Fatimah Asghar, JoAnn Balingit, Ellen Bass, Eavan



Boland, Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello, Marianne Chan, Kristin Change, Leila Chatti, Cathy Linh Che, Franny Choi, Safia Elhillo, Tarfia Faizullah, Hafizah Geter, Gabriella Gutierrez Y. Muhs, Janine Joseph, Mohja Kahf, Ada Limón, Emtihal Mahmoud, Mia Ayumi Malhotra, Lenelle Moise, Yesenia Montilla, Gala Mukomolova, Aimee Nezhuku-Matathil, Ladan Osman, Michelle Brittan Rosado, Erika L. Sánchez, Solmaz Sharif, Mahtem Shifererraw, Terisa Siagatonu, Safiya Sinclair, Monica Sok, Alice Tao, Chrysanthemum Tran, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, Sholeh Wolpe, and Jenny Xie.<sup>[31]</sup>

### *History of Spoken Word Poetry*

Language comes in the form of speech, gestures, and writing; spoken word goes back as far as there has been language. Storytellers from every culture use spoken word to pass along traditions and values from generation to generation. Griots from Africa brought songs and performances to new continents, Native Americans continues to value storytelling as a social practice, and the Medieval storytellers traveled from town to town exchanged their storytelling performances with food, lodging and items of value. Greek classics like *The Iliad* (word count: 193,536) was written down by Homer in the 800s BC about the Trojan War which took place in the 1200s BC; for the span of over 400 years *The Iliad* was memorized, passed down and performed orally from generation to generation.<sup>[32]</sup> Similarly, Shakespeare's sonnets and plays were meant to be spoken and performed in the Globe Theater. After the invention of the printing press in the 1400s, spoken word became less necessary as stories and poetry were written down and printed to reach a larger audience.

Modern spoken word is often a performance art based on the poem as well as the performer's aesthetic qualities. This type of spoken word can be traced back to the Beat poets of the 1950s and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. Spoken word has become a "catchall" term that includes any kind of poetry recited aloud, including jazz poetry, rap, comedy routines, theater, and prose monologues; it may draw on music, sound, dance, or other kinds of performance to connect with audiences. Today, modern poets gather and compete at events called Poetry Slams, popularized by the hip hop culture in the 1990s, characterized by rhyme, repetition, word play, and improvisation, frequently addressed social issues of justice, politics, race, and community. Contemporary poets have also taken spoken word online and used social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (rebranded as X in 2023) as the new digital stage with mainly micro-poetry to reach a global audience.

### *Literature on Immigrant Family Separation*

The poem-video *Separated by a Smuggler* is about a young girl's brutal journey to the U.S. with a single goal of finding her mother (<https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/the-new-yorker-documentary-a-line-birds-cannot-see>), more age-appropriate for high school students. The children book *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* by Edwidge Danticat and illustrated by Leslie Staub, is also a good resource for younger readers from K to 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

### *Social Studies Connections through Mapping and Informational Research*

For the classroom activities about national identity and border crossings, I have researched and written portraits of three of my immigrant students with brief history of their birthplaces: 1) Student J from Playa Grande of Guatemala, heartland of K'iche' (Quiché) people, one of the Maya peoples. 2) Student Z from Phnom Penh of Cambodia with a population of 1,573,544 people.<sup>[33]</sup> 3) Student M from the Kasese District of Uganda, near Rwenzori Mountains and Lake Victoria with its area is divided among 3 countries: Tanzania occupies 49%, Uganda 45% and Kenya 6% of the lake.<sup>[34]</sup> These three student portraits and the history of their birthplaces are intended to be used by teachers as examples in the discussion of national identity.

### *Portrait Sketch of Student J, the Guatemalan Civil War, and Playa Grande*

**Student J** is known as “my Little Man” because he is more mature, but shorter, than most of the boys in my 5th grade class. I understand him when he said he saw “ghosts” and how he was afraid to go outside and also stay in his house. Not only that, but I started to wonder what is the Spanish word for ghosts? Espiritu? Fantasmas? This immediately conjures the memories of my own culture, where incenses are burnt for ancestors or relatives who had been mistreated in life and not given a proper burial. I see in him my mother’s “superstition” not as an ignorance, but as a strength of an immigrant’s hope for a better life, and “reality fear” that the American Dream is a lie and will always be unreachable. The other day, Student J said he talked to his mother over the phone and that’s why he was late to school. He gave up a warm smile after telling me.

**The Guatemalan Civil War (1960 to 1996)** was fought between the government of Guatemala and various leftist rebel groups over issues of unfair land distribution. The Guatemala government was responsible for the brutal genocide against the Maya population and other human rights violation.<sup>[35]</sup> Most Maya Americans originate from western Guatemala and Chiapas, and there are 21 different Mayan communities in Guatemala, making up about 51% of the country’s population. In 1992, the Mayan exile Rigoberta Menchú Tum was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; this gave the Mayan struggles an increased international recognition as well as some safeguard from military suppression.<sup>[36]</sup>

**Brief Description of Guatemala and Playa Grande:** The border countries of Guatemala are Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. The Maya People of Guatemala have suffered a history through conquest, colonization and the domination of the ruling elite. Guatemala has a current population of 14.9 million inhabitants, of which 6.5 million (43.75%) belong to one of the 22 Maya peoples (Achi', Akateco, Awakateco, Chalchiteco, Ch'orti', Chuj, Itza', Ixil, Jacalteco, Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteco, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil and Us-pantek), one Garífuna, one Xinca and one Creole or Afro-descendant peoples.<sup>[37]</sup> The country lacks a differentiated statistical base on Indigenous Peoples, especially on Indigenous women. The disparities between the Indigenous and the non-indigenous population in employment, income, health, and education continue to cause major problems for the country. Playa Grande (Spanish: Big Beach) where Student J was born, is a town and the administrative center of the municipality of Ixcán.

### *Portrait Sketch of Student Z, the Cambodian Civil War, and Phnom Penh*

**Student Z** is quiet and timid. Among her peers, she shows the most academic talents, especially in math and writing. She is an excellent student, well-behaved and never ask for my attention. Often, she doesn't like to show her emotions and how smart she is. Sometimes I think it stems from her Asian cultural upbringing and the fear of authority.

**The Cambodian Civil War (1967 to 1975)** was fought between the Communist Party (Khmer Rouge supported by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong) and the Kingdom of Cambodia (after 1970, known as the Khmer Republic) supported by South Vietnam and the United States.<sup>[38]</sup> After five years of fighting, the Khmer Republic was defeated on April 17, 1975, by the victorious Khmer Rouge and later established Democratic Kampuchea as the new government.<sup>[39]</sup> Between 1975 and 1994, about 149,000 Cambodians entered the United States as refugees, 6,000 entered as immigrants, and 2,500 as humanitarian and public interest parolees.<sup>[40]</sup> According to the 2010 US Census, an estimated 276,667 people of Cambodian descent live in the United States, with most concentrated in California, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.<sup>[41]</sup>

**Brief Description of Cambodia and Phnom Penh:** The border countries of Cambodia are Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary government, the ruling party “Cambodian People’s Party” banned the main opposition party and won all 125 National Assembly seats of the 2018 election, turning the country into a de facto one-party state.<sup>[42]</sup> One current major problem in Cambodia is the water and sanitation: In 2020, nearly 3.4 million people in Cambodia don’t have basic access to safe drinking water, and 6.5 million people don’t have basic access to their own toilet or basic sanitation.<sup>[43]</sup> Phnom Penh (Penh’s Hill or Mountain) is the capital city of Cambodia and its major economic industrial, and cultural center.

#### *Portrait Sketch of Student M, the Ugandan Bush War, and the Kasese District*

**Student M** is a newcomer to the United States in late fall of 2023. She is independent, industrious, and academically focused. I can’t force Student M to make friends, but she is firm that she doesn’t want to sit with the other girls or boys during lunch and class. She sometimes asked to sit alone at a corner desk to happily do her work. Among teachers, she is an attention seeker, and is not afraid to call out wrong answers over and over again until she gets it correctly.

**The Ugandan Bush War (1980 to 1986)** was a civil war between the official government with its armed group Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLU) against a number of rebel group, most active was the National Resistance Army (NRA).<sup>[44]</sup> The reason for the Ugandan Bush War started with the 1971 coup d’état of the unpopular President Milton Obote by General Idi Amin, a military dictator.<sup>[45]</sup> In 1979, General Amin was overthrown after the Uganda-Tanzania War [citation 27]. Then in 1980, Amin’s loyalists started the Bush War by launching an insurgency in the West Nile region, north-west region of Uganda.<sup>[46]</sup> According to the Migration Policy Institute, the total number of immigrants from Uganda estimated from 2018 to 2022 was about 36,700 people; Middlesex County, Massachusetts had the largest number with 3,900 people.<sup>[47]</sup> Organizations, such as the Immigration Guide, have helped Ugandan immigrants struggling to find ways of settling in the US with financing, housing and job placements.<sup>[48]</sup>

**Brief Description of Uganda and Kampala:** The border countries of Uganda are Kenya, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania. The documentary, *Bob Wine: The President's People*, to give a current perspective of the political climate in Uganda; the film receives a 2024 Oscar nomination alongside four other documentaries, including Tunisian documentary *Four Daughters*. One major problem of Uganda is arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention: There are claims that over 3,000 Ugandans were abducted and tortured since November 2020, and an estimate of 150 were killed.<sup>[49]</sup> Kampala is the capital and largest city of Uganda with a rapidly growing population estimated at about 4 million in 2024.<sup>[50]</sup>

### *Collage Essays for Personal Writing and Research*

Literary collage in language-based work can now mean any composition that includes words, phrases, or sections of outside source material in juxtaposition. T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is an early example of literacy collage that includes newspaper clippings, music lyrics, nursery rhymes, and overheard speech. Dadaists of the 1920s use experimental poetry like collages to free text and speech from conventional restraints of spelling, grammar, and punctuation as a reaction to the horrors of WWI. Tristan Tzara, a Romanian, French, and Jewish avant-garde poet and self-proclaimed founder of the Dada Movement, described the collage process with a text titled: "To Make a Dadaist Poem." The concept of collage was later popularized in the 1950s and early 1960s by the Beat Generation in San Francisco, California; artist-poets like William Burrough, Bruce Connor and Ed Kienholz began to immerse into more political collage and multi-media assemblage.<sup>[51]</sup> Today, collages is a literary technique in which a written text is founded, cut up, rearranged, and glued down to create a new text.

The term "collage essay" refers to writing that is discontinuous, segmented, and/or patchwork with discrete pieces of description, dialogues, narratives, images (drawn or found), short phrases, photographs, objects, and the like.<sup>[52]</sup> Other synonymous terms include: "literary collage," "collage novels," and "patchworks" which carry the same basic technique of mapping out your writings with fragments and juxtapositions of texts, images, and sometimes even 3-D objects. The four main types of collages in this unit include: 1) Paper collages using drawings, found words, found images, paper and glue; 2) Digital collages using platforms like Google Slides and Canva; 3) Mixed media collages may include performance of spoken word, music, and video.<sup>[53]</sup> Using collage as a writer is a physical act of assembling your ideas and mapping out how seemingly unrelated texts can create new meanings.

### **Teaching Strategies:**

Immigrants have the unique experiences that are often misrepresented and misunderstood by the majority. Reading and writing graphic novels, historical fiction, personal narratives and informational pieces about the U.S. immigrant experience from countries like Guatemala, Cambodia and Uganda will be used to address Social Studies standards about immigration. Cultural artifacts (as the use of objects or images of objects as primary sources) can be an effective teaching strategy to hook student's interest and support their inquiry. Simply, ask students to can bring in one to three personal artifacts from home (such as an old photo, letters, jewelries, household items).

*Pairings of Spoken Words (YouTube videos) and the Book Ink Knows No Border:*

1. "Home" by Warsan Shire (British-Somali) and "Home" by Safiya Sinclair (Jamaican).
2. "Pronounce Us Correctly" by Muna Abdulahi (Somali-American) and "On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance" by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (American poet with Filipina and Malayali-Indian background).
3. "If They Come For Us" by Fatimah Asghar (South Asian American) and "The Break-In" by Hafizah Geter, (Nigerian American).
4. "Alien Suite" and "self-portrait with no flag" by Safia Elhillo (Sudanese-American).
5. "At the Wall" by Paola and Karla Gonzalez (Mexican-American), and "Dear America" by Sholeh Wolpe (Iranian-American).
6. "Return" by Valeen Jules (Native American and Canadian) and "Return" by Gala Mukomolova, Moscow-born and Brooklyn-raised.

Below are suggested steps for the six-part (Part A to Part E) teaching strategy to analyze the poems selected for this unit:

Part A) *Define and Discuss Activity*: Have students discuss the focused terms and the essential question: How would you write a poem with only images first before writing the text? Use a chart paper to make a class poster of each of the following terms: home, name, national identity, otherness, border crossings, and home return. Post these posters for the duration of the unit and have students revisit them and add notes and draw images accordingly.

Part B) *Watch, Listen and Draw Activity* for each spoken word YouTube video and. Use worksheet #1 for students to draw. Most of the videos can be found on the website <https://www.womenofwise.org/post/5-poems>. Important trigger warnings: Some of these poems contains derogatory ethnic terms and references to sexual crimes, gun violence and derogatory ethnic terms. Teachers are advised to establish a class contract of respect and understanding for immigrants and refugees at the beginning of each lesson. Making stretches and drawings of what does home mean to you, and create a map of a real or fictional journey of a woman or a girl immigrating to another place using online tools like Google Earth. Embedded Math and Social Studies standards about ordered coordinates, and themes of geography. In small groups using the Gallery Walk Model to address the ELA Common Core Standards on text structure, character development, setting and plot.

Part C) *Close Read and Blockout Poem Activity*: Close reading usually consists of reading the text with three different purposes. Xero the selected poetic text from the book *Ink Knows No Border* or use the worksheet 3, 4, and 5 at the end of this unit. 1<sup>st</sup> reading: circle unfamiliar words. 2<sup>nd</sup> reading: summarize the theme of the poem. 3<sup>rd</sup> reading: text render the poem by blocking out lines, leaving only the most significant words untouched.

Part D) *Cut, Paste and Write Collage Activity*: The following focused questions will be used as writing prompts for the literary collages (See worksheet 1): 1. What does "home" mean to us? 2. How to re-name and re-claim who we are? 3. Why is national identity important in providing a sense of belonging? Is home a country? 4. How do we deal with others see us as "alien"? 5. Social Studies Mapping: Is border crossing a crime or a human right? 6. Refer to the essence of the quote "Ma, when I come back, what will I bring?" by Amitava Kumar, what new cultural

artifacts do we bring from our second homeland to our first homeland? Students can use online platforms like Google Slides, Canva, DALL·E to generate digital images from texts.

Part E) *Perform Spoken Word and Publish Written Poem Activity*: Hold a class/school-wide/community Poetry Slam for a friendly competition of spoken word. Also publish student poems online and/or paper for circulation.

## **Classroom Activities**

### *Prerequisite Introductory Lessons:*

Ask students to imagine that they have to immediately pack a suitcase with 5 items that they cannot live without before crossing the U.S. borders to another country for temporary residency. Show the three student portrait sketches and description of their birth countries from the above section under Content Objective. On a world map, have students pinpoint these countries and add other countries and cities of study throughout the year. Sample homework assignment: If you must leave the United States immediately, what 3 to 5 items would you put in your travelling suitcase? Class discussion on the essential question: How to analyze and create poems through juxtaposition of texts, spoken words, and visual images?

### *Classroom Activity 1: Home*

Part A (Worksheet 1): Define and discuss: What does the word “home” mean to me, and how does it make me feel? Using a comic strip template (be creative with the size and shape of each panel), draw and label the following four nouns to remind you of home: 1) idea example: peace; 2) people example: my family; 3) place example: my room); 4) thing examples: a soccer ball, a cat, or my favorite dish. Part B (Worksheet 2: Watch the YouTube video of the poem “Home” by Warsan Shire, a British-Somali poet, and draw. Example: shark eating house feet/shoes running away, another pair of shoes running away, gun, house, gun, candle slowly lit, face with lit candle, candle blow off, tub, toy boat in tub, open hand, a toy train on palm of the hand, newspaper outside of door, begging hands inside a cage, feet walking away, outline of a country with a man profile, another outline of a country with another man profile, 3rd country..., the word “HOME” written repeatedly in rows, a human figure, a shark jumping out and into the ocean, a shoreline, a man walking and then crawling on the shoreline, house, face with unlit candle, feet walking away. Part C (Worksheet 3): Read the poem “Home” by Safiya Sinclair, and make a blackout poem. Part D (Paper or online): Write (construct) a paper literary collage in the format of a wordless graphic novel using the theme of home and investigate the juxtaposition of words and images that are nouns.

### *Classroom Activity 2: Name*

Part A (Worksheet 1): Define and discuss “What does your name means to you, and/or to other people? Does your name represent who you are? If not, how do we re-name and re-claim who we are? Part B (Worksheet 2): Watch the YouTube video of the poem “Pronounce Us Correctly” by Muna Abdulahi Part C (Worksheet 3): Read the poem “On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance” by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, and make a blackout poem. Part D: Write (construct)

a paper literary collage using the initial of your first and/or last names in the format of an acrostic poem. Use found images and words from magazines and other prints.

### *Classroom Activity 3: National Identity*

Part A (Worksheet 1): National identity is a person's identity or sense of belonging to one or more states or one or more nations. It is the sense of "a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language". Discuss countries of different national identity: United States, Canada, Mexico, China. Use samples of Uganda, Cambodia, and Guatemala. Part B (Worksheet 2): Watch the YouTube vide of the poem "If They Come For Us" by Fatimah Asghar. Part C (Worksheet 4): Read "The Break-In" by Hafizah Geter, and make a blackout poem. Part D: Write (construct) a paper literary collage that can be serve as a national pledge and/or symbol like a flag of a country.

### *Classroom Activity 4: Otherness*

Part A (Worksheet 1): Define and discuss terms such as "others", "alien," "illegal," "undocumented," "racial slurs," and questions: How do others see me? What is my alien suite? Two sides of me? Part B (Worksheet 2): Watch the YouTube video "Alien Suite by Safia Elhillo and draw. Part C (Worksheet 4) : Read the poem "self-portrait with no flag" by the same poet Safia Elhillo. Part D: Write (construct) a digital literary collage.

### *Classroom Activity 5: Border Crossing*

Revisit the world and country maps from Classroom Activity 3. Part A (Worksheet 1): Discuss what are borders, where are they, how are they decided. Where do I belong in the world? In my community? In my school? In my own home? Part B (Worksheet 2): Watch the YouTube video "At the Wall" by Paola and Karla Gonzalez, and draw. Part C (Worksheet 5): Read the poem "Dear America" by Sholeh Wolpe and make a blackout poem. Part D: Using a world map, the class will collectively write (construct) a large-scale collage essay about border crossing.

### *Classroom Activity 6: The Return*

Ask students: what would you bring back to U.S. or the country where you were born and refer to the quote: "Ma, when I come back, what will I bring?" Write the Japanese word *kikokushijo*, (returnee children) on a chart paper. Explain how the Japanese views of *kikokushijo* have not always been positive; in the 1970s, they were characterized in media and even by their own parents as "educational orphans" in need of "rescue" to reduce their foreignness and successfully reintegrate them back into Japanese society. Part A (Worksheet 1): Discuss what is the meaning of returning to one's birthplace. Part B (Worksheet 2): Watch the YouTube video "Return" by Valeen Jules, and draw. Part C (Worksheet 5): Read the poem "Return" by Gala Mukomolova, and make a blackout poem. Part D: Write (construct) personal a paper collage essay about one's birthplace and any family migration and travel throughout the U.S. and/or around the world.

Part E (Multimedia format): As a culminative celebration, student works can be uploaded on a school website, a blog, and social media. In person, poetry slam can be impromptu or organize as a school wide community event.

## Appendix: Standards Addressed

The unit addresses the 5th grade English Language Art Common Cores Standards on the Integration of Knowledge and Ideas for both literature and informational text (RL.5.7 and RI.5.7), Writing (W.5.10), and Speaking (SL.5.1.C), and also the 5th grade Pennsylvania Social Studies Standards on Geography: the Human Characteristics of Places and Regions (PA.7.3.6), and the Causes of Human Movement (PA.7.3.6.A.2).

RL.5.7: Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem). RI.5.7: Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently. W.5.10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. SL.5.1.C: Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.

PA Social Studies Standards 7.3.6: Geography: The Human Characteristics of Places and Regions: Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every student to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed. PA Social Studies Standards 7.3.6.A.2: Causes of human movement: Mobility (e.g., shopping, commuting, recreation); Migration models (e.g., push/pull factors, barriers to migration).

### Spoken Word Videos

Button Poetry. "Muna Abdulahi - Pronounce Us Correctly." *YouTube (Video)*. September 4, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh\\_NB67o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh_NB67o)

Button Poetry. "Safia Elhillo - Alien Suite." *YouTube (Video)*. June 13, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh5wSt-hfL0>

Garrett M. 2017. "'Home' by Warsan Shire." *YouTube (Video)*. March 13, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo&t=206s>

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"Paola Gonzalez & Karla Gutierrez - at the Wall, US/Mexican Border, Texas, 2020." n.d. *YouTube (Video)*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loHz2oQhLEI>

"TikTok - Make Your Day." n.d. *Tik Tok (Video)*. Accessed June 23, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/daughter-of-immigrant-poems?lang=en>

Vancouver Poetry House. 2016. "Valeen Jules - Return." *YouTube (Video)*. August 28, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT6l\\_O6GvAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT6l_O6GvAY)



Appendix: Worksheet 1 for Part A (Define and Discuss)

**DAUGHTERS OF IMMIGRANTS FOCUSED QUESTIONS**

Essential Question: How to analyze and create poems through the juxtaposition of texts, spoken words, and visual images?

1. *What does "home" mean to us?*

**How to re-name and re-claim who we are?**

**3. WHY IS NATIONAL IDENTITY IMPORTANT IN PROVIDING A SENSE OF BELONGING? IS HOME A COUNTRY?**

*4. How do we act or react when others see us as "alien"?*

**Is border crossing a crime or a human right?**

What do we bring from our second homeland to our first homeland?

Appendix: Worksheet 2 for Part B (Watch, Listen and Draw)

**DAUGHERS OF IMMIGRANTS SPOKEN WORD**

Watch YouTube Video, Listen, and Draw

*Home is..*

"Home" by Warsan Shire  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xlygo&t=206s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xlygo&t=206s)

**Name**

"Pronounce Us Correctly" by Muna Abdulahi  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh\\_NB67o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVzh_NB67o)

**NATIONAL  
IDENTITY**

"If They Come For Us" by Fatimah Asghar  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=B74J-cQ8-zg&t=1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B74J-cQ8-zg&t=1s)

*Otherness*

"Alien Suite" by Safia Elhillo  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fkhC\\_FLUDA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fkhC_FLUDA)

**Border  
Crossings**

"At the Wall" by Paola Gonzalez and Karla Gutierrez  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=loHz2oQhLEI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loHz2oQhLEI)

**Return**

"Return" by Valeen Jules  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT6L\\_O6GvAY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT6L_O6GvAY)

## Appendix: Worksheet 3 for Part C (Read and Blockout Poem)

### DAUGHTERS OF IMMIGRANTS POETRY

Read and Blockout Words

*Home by Safiya Sinclair*

Have I forgotten it –  
wild conch-shell dialect,

black apostrophe curled  
tight on my tongue?

Or how the Spanish built walls  
of broken glass to keep me out

but the Doctor Bird kept chasing  
and raking me in: This place

is your place, wreathed in red  
Sargassum, ancient driftwood

nursed on the pensive sea.  
The ramshackle altar I visited

often, packed full with fish-skull,  
bright with lignum vitae plumes:

Father, I have asked so many miracles  
of it. To be patient and forgiving,

to be remade for you in some  
small wonder. And what a joy

to still believe in anything.  
My diction now as straight

as my hair; that stranger we've  
long stopped searching for.

But if somehow our half-sunken  
hearts could answer, I would cup

my mouth in warm bowls  
over the earth, and kiss the wet dirt

of home, taste Bogue-mud  
and one long orange peel for skin.

I'd open my ear for sugar cane  
and long stalks of gungo peas

to climb in. I'd swim the sea  
still lapsing in a soldered frame,

the sea that again and again  
calls out my name.

**On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance  
by Aimee Nezhukumatathil**

**Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle  
your nose from the fake-lemon antiseptic**

**of the mopped floors and wiped-down  
doorknobs. The freshly soaped necks**

**and armpits. Your teacher means well,  
even if he butchers your name like**

**he has a bloody sausage casing stuck  
between his teeth, handprints**

**on his white, sloppy apron. And when  
everyone turns around to check out**

**your face, no need to flush red and warm.  
Just picture all the eyes as if your classroom**

**is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues  
and you will remember that winter your family**

**took you to the China Sea and you sank  
your face in it to gaze at baby clams and sea  
stars**

**the size of your outstretched hand. And when  
all those necks start to crane, try not to forget**

**someone once lathered their bodies, once patted  
them  
dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their  
clothes**

**for the first day of school. Think of their pencil  
cases  
from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink  
pearl eraser.**

**Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its  
tiny blade.**

## Appendix: Worksheet 4 for Part C (Read and Blockout Poem)

### DAUGHTERS OF IMMIGRANTS POETRY

#### Read and Blockout Words

#### “The Break-In” by Hafizah Geter

When I close my eyes I see my mother  
running  
from one house to another, throwing her fist  
at the doors of neighbors, begging anyone  
to call the police.  
There are times when every spectator is  
hungry,  
times a thief takes nothing, leaves you a fool  
in your inventory.  
How one trespass could make all others  
suddenly visible. My mother counted  
her jewelry and called  
overseas. My father counted women  
afraid one of us would go  
missing. When I close my eyes  
I hear my mother saying, “A’aha, this new  
country,”  
my cousins exclaiming “Auntie!”  
between the clicking line and their tongues.  
Tonight the distance between me, my mother,  
and Nigeria  
is like a jaw splashed against a wall.  
I close my eyes and see my father  
sulking like a pile of ashes,  
his hair jet black and kinky,  
his silence entering a thousand rooms.  
Then outside, trimming hedges as if home  
were a land just beyond the meadow,  
the leaves suddenly back.  
When I close my eyes  
I see my mother, mean for the rest of the day,  
rawing my back in the tub  
like she’s still doing dishes.

Published in the print edition of the March 6, 2017, issue, with the headline “The Break-in.”

#### Self-Portrait With No Flag

i pledge allegiance to my  
homies to my mother’s  
small & cool palms to  
the gap between my brother’s  
two front teeth & to  
my grandmother’s good brown  
hands good strong brown  
hands gathering my bare feet  
in her lap

i pledge allegiance to the  
group text i pledge allegiance  
to laughter & to all the boys  
i have a crush on i pledge  
allegiance to my spearmint plant  
to my split ends to my grandfather’s  
brain & gray left eye

i come from two failed countries  
& i give them back i pledge  
allegiance to no land no border  
cut by force to draw blood i pledge  
allegiance to no government no  
collection of white men carving up  
the map with their pens

i choose the table at the waffle house  
with all my loved ones crowded  
into the booth i choose the shining  
dark of our faces through a thin sheet  
of smoke glowing dark of our faces  
slick under layers of sweat i choose  
the world we make with our living  
refusing to be unmade by what surrounds  
us i choose us gathered at the lakeside  
the light glinting off the water & our  
laughing teeth & along the living  
dark of our hair & this is my only country

- by Safia Elhillo

## Appendix: Worksheet 5 for Part C (Read and Blockout Poem)

### DAUGHTERS OF IMMIGRANTS POETRY

#### Read and Blockout Words

#### Dear America

You used to creep into my room,  
remember?

I was eleven and you kept coming,  
night after night, in Tehran, slid in  
from inside the old radio on my desk, past  
the stack of geometry homework, across  
the faded Persian carpet, and thrust  
into me, with rock and roll thumps.

I loved you more than bubble gum,  
more than the imported bananas  
street vendors sold for a fortune.  
I thought you were azure, America,  
and orange, like the sky, and poppies,  
like mother's new dress, and kumquats.

I dreamed of you, America, I dreamed  
you every single night with the ferocity  
of a lost child until you became true like flesh.  
And when I arrived at you, you punched  
yourself into me like a laugh.

SHOLEH WOLPÉ

"Return" by Gala Mukomolova

There are poets with history and poets without history,  
Tsvetaeva claimed living through the ruin of Russia.

Karina says disavow every time I see her. We, the  
daughters between countries, wear our mean mothers like  
scarves around our necks.

Every visit, mine recounts all the wrongs done against her  
ring sent for polishing returned with a lesser diamond,  
Years of never rest and, she looks at me, of nothing to be  
proud of.

I am covered in welts and empty pockets so large sobs  
escape me in the backroom of my Landlord's fabric shop.  
He moves to wipe my tears

as if I'm his daughter  
or I'm no one's daughter.

It's true, I let him take my hand, I am a girl who needs  
something, I slow cook bone  
grief, use a weak voice.

My mother calls me the girl with holes in her hands, every  
time I lose something.

All Russian daughters were snowflakes once, and in their  
hair a ribbon long  
as their body knotted and knotted and knotted into a large  
translucent bow.

It happens, teachers said, that a child between countries  
will refuse to speak.  
A girl with a hole in her throat, every day I opened the  
translation book.

Silent, I took my shoes off when I came home, I  
put my house clothes on.

We had no songs, few rituals. On Yom Kippur, we lit a  
candle for the dead  
and no one knew a prayer.

We kept the candle lit, that's all.  
The wave always returns, and always returns a different  
wave.

I was small. I built a self outside my self because a child  
needs shelter.

Not even you knew I was strange,  
I ate the food my family ate, I answered to my name.  
Copyright © 2018 by Gala Mukomolova. Originally published  
in Poem-a-Day on February 9, 2018, by the Academy of  
American Poets.

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