

Can You Hear Me? Let's Lift the Voices of Immigrant Students

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Abstract

This curriculum unit addresses the critical need to amplify the voices of immigrant students within American public schools where one in ten students is an English Language Learner (ELL).

This unit investigates the systemic barriers that contribute to the silencing of immigrant students' narratives and experiences across U.S. classrooms. Moreover, it offers an innovative, universally applicable, and adaptable framework and empowers immigrant students to write and publish their immigrant stories. This endeavor will foster English language acquisition and cultural empowerment. ESOL/ELL students often encounter unwelcoming environments, bias, and invisibility in educational settings; this unit provides a structured approach to narrative sharing and cultural expression that will allow ESOL students to be seen, heard, and given a voice through storytelling.

It is posited that providing immigrant students with opportunities to share their stories enhances their language acquisition and development and strengthens school community cohesion through cross-cultural understanding.

Key Words: ESOL/ELL education, immigrant student narratives, cultural storytelling, multilingual learner empowerment, culturally responsive teaching, English language acquisition immigration experiences

In the eyes of God, a child on the other side of the border is no less worthy of love and compassion than my own child. We - we can't distinguish between them in terms of their worth and their inherent dignity and that they're deserving of shelter and love and education and opportunity. We can't isolate ourselves. We can't hide behind a wall. (Barack Obama n.d.)

-Barack Obama

Unit Content

Problem Statement

Imagine walking into a classroom where every voice matters and every story has the power to change hearts and minds. This is the potential we see in our immigrant students, yet many find themselves silenced in American schools. The term "immigrant" itself is inadequate to capture the diverse experiences of those living in a country other than their birth nation, whether they are migrants, foreign-born, international migrants, or refugees (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Regardless of their status, these students need welcoming spaces to share their immigration experiences and their journeys through the American education system.

Unfortunately, safe spaces are often replaced with unwelcoming environments, bias, invisibility, and hardships ((Irwin et al., 2023). In the United States public school system, one in ten students are English Language Learners (ELLs) (Irwin et al., 2023). Their experiences can inspire others and create greater understanding among their peers and teachers. However, they face numerous obstacles before they can lift their voices and be truly seen and heard.

The scale of this challenge is significant. In 2023, 694,900 immigrants resided in Philadelphia, comprising 11 percent of the total population. Of these, 288,400 were children with at least one immigrant

parent (Vera Institute of Justice, 2023). The School District of Philadelphia refers to ELL students as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These terms are used interchangeably. The ESOL population has soared in Philadelphia Public Schools. From the 2014-15 to 2022-23 school years, the number of schools where ELs made up 20% or more of the student population more than doubled, growing from 26 schools to 59 schools (Schlesinger, 2023).

This growth is mirrored in individual schools. For example, at the Robert B. Pollock School, where I work as an ESOL teacher, the ESOL population has increased from 12% in the 2014-2015 school year to 24% in the 2023-2024 school year. The school now educates ESOL students who speak 25 distinct home languages (School District of Philadelphia, 2022).

The challenges faced by immigrant students are vividly illustrated in cases like that of Maria, a 16-year-old student from El Salvador. As documented by (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) Maria struggled with English proficiency and cultural adaptation, leading to feelings of isolation in high school. However, with targeted support from her ESOL program and culturally sensitive counseling, Maria improved her academic performance and social integration over two years.

This curriculum unit aims to explore the reasons why some immigrant students struggle to excel in their English-speaking skills and why some feel silenced in school. More importantly, it seeks to amplify the voices of immigrant students. The goal is to transform them from isolated individuals to leaders within their school communities. These students will write and publish their immigration stories in their own voices, allowing others to hear them and, most importantly, learn from them.

By providing opportunities for these voices to be heard and seen, we can create a powerful tool for immigrant students to see themselves truly and for others to develop empathy by recognizing shared experiences. As Cummins (2021) argues, rethinking the education of

multilingual learners requires a critical analysis of our current approaches and a commitment to creating inclusive learning environments.

This initiative is not just about improving English skills; it's about nurturing the whole student. It's about creating safe spaces where vulnerability is a strength, where diversity is celebrated, and where every accent adds to the rich chorus of our shared American experience. By amplifying these voices, we're not just teaching language; we're shaping a more inclusive, empathetic, and understanding generation.

Content Objectives:

To amplify these unheard voices, we must first understand the many factors that can make immigrant children feel unheard in the classroom.

Cultural Identity and Migration

Cultural identity is defined as the sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group (Schwartz, S. J., et al., 2010).

It plays a pivotal role in the immigrant student experience. Research indicates that a strong, positive ethnic identity correlates with improved psychological adjustment and academic outcomes among immigrant youth (Umaña-Taylor AJ et al., 2014).

However, the process of identity formation in immigrant adolescents is complex and often fraught with challenges.

Understanding cultural identity is paramount in the context of our Philadelphia schools, where the immigrant population has grown by 69% between 2000 and 2016 (Pew Charitable Trusts(2018)). Students in our ESOL programs navigate what Berry (2006) terms "acculturative

stress," the psychological strain associated with adapting to a new cultural environment. Our curriculums must address this by creating spaces for identity exploration and expression.

Moreover, various types of migration can impact students and their families. Migration is a heterogeneous phenomenon encompassing economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and second-generation immigrants. Each category presents unique challenges and opportunities that significantly impact students' educational experiences and outcomes (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

In our Philadelphia schools, we encounter this diversity daily. Refugee students, for instance, often grapple with interrupted formal education and trauma, necessitating specialized educational and psychosocial support (McBrien, 2005). Conversely, children of skilled migrants may face different challenges, such as high parental expectations and the pressure to succeed in a new academic environment (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) coined the term "mode of incorporation." It refers to the conditions under which immigrants enter and are received by the host society. For example, some immigrant groups might be welcomed with supportive policies and positive public attitudes, while others might face restrictive policies and discrimination. These different reception contexts can influence how well immigrants adapt to their new lives in the United States, affecting areas such as education, employment, and social integration (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Additionally, the mode of incorporation in schools is demonstrated positively when the school community welcomes immigrant students and their families and provides support and resources. These students may adapt more easily and perform better academically. Conversely, it is demonstrated negatively when the school environment is unwelcoming or discriminatory,

which could negatively impact students' adaptation and academic performance (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Furthermore, it is important to understand the historical context of immigration in the United States. Immigration is currently a hot and very controversial topic. Everyone seems to have an opinion about it, especially politicians.

To further demonstrate, in July 2023, former President Donald Trump and J.D. Vance, a Republican Senator from Ohio, made comments about Haitian immigrants that were widely criticized as racist and xenophobic. Trump claimed during a campaign event in Iowa, that Haitian immigrants were coming to America with AIDS. He also stated, "They're coming into our country, and they're coming in from Africa, from Asia, but they're also coming in from the island." (Rinaldi et al., 2023). Moreover, on the Jack Murphy Live podcast interview that aired on July 21, 2023, Vance said that Haitians eat cats and dogs. He said, "My view is that we should probably not let any of those people into our country because the food supply is already strained, and I don't want to have to let a bunch of Haitians eat my dog." (Choi, 2023).

Moreover, President Trump doubled down on his feelings about the Haitian immigrants who obtained legal status to be in Springfield, Ohio, during the ABC Presidential Debate, which was aired on September 10, 2024. Trump proclaimed, "In Springfield, they're eating the dogs. The people that came in. They're eating the cats. They're eating -- they're eating the pets of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country. And it's a shame." (Hoffman, 2024).

Because of rhetoric like this, it is clearly difficult for immigrants of color to have a positive mode of incorporation in American society as they are viewed through lenses that have been comprised of racism and xenophobia.

Some may wonder, when did views on immigration become negative in the United States? It is shocking to hear the above-stated views are from a president of the United States and the current senator of Ohio. In short, immigration has always favored white immigration even though our country has historically been called the melting pot. This term was coined to describe cultural integration and even the assimilation of immigrants into the US (European Center for Populism Studies, 2020).

To further explain, immigration has historically been a point of pride for the United States. For example, during the 1600s-1700s, the United States had an open-door policy for European settlers, primarily from England, Scotland, and Germany, seeking religious freedom, economic opportunity, or fleeing persecution. (Daniels, 2002). This trend continued with the First Naturalization Act of 1790, which furthered immigration of "free white persons" of "good moral character," explicitly excluding Native Americans, enslaved people, and, later, Asian immigrants. The United States policies that favored European immigration continue today (Daniels, 2002).

On the bright side, Philadelphia has been a sanctuary city since 1916. As such, Philadelphia's immigration history offers a rich tapestry for exploration. From the German and Irish immigrants of the 19th century to the recent influxes from Latin America, Asia, and Africa; our city has been shaped by successive waves of immigration. The establishment of ethnic enclaves like Chinatown and the Italian Market reflects the enduring impact of these migrations on Philadelphia's urban fabric (Vitiello & Sugrue, 2017).

Language Acquisition and Bilingualism

The process of acquiring a second language is far from simple. Unlike first language acquisition, which typically occurs naturally in childhood, second language learners face unique challenges. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level. This theory underpins the importance of providing our English learners with rich, contextual language experiences.

However, the path to proficiency is not linear. Selinker's (1972) concept of interlanguage reminds us that learners develop their own linguistic system that is neither their first language nor the target language. This explains why our Spanish-speaking students might say things like "I have 10 years old" instead of "I am 10 years old". They're navigating between language systems.

Moreover, numerous hurdles exist in this process. A longitudinal study by (Hakuta et al 2000) found that it takes 3-5 years to develop oral proficiency in English and 4-7 years to reach academic proficiency. This research underscores the need for sustained support for our English learners, even after they appear fluent in conversational English.

Bilingualism has many well-documented benefits. For example, Bialystok et al (2012) reviewed extensive research showing that it enhances cognitive abilities, including executive function and metalinguistic awareness. These skills can translate into academic advantages, particularly in problem-solving and critical thinking.

Although bilingualism has some challenges, such as code-switching, which alternates between languages, it is a common practice among bilinguals. While once viewed negatively,

current research recognizes it as a sophisticated linguistic skill. As García & Wei (2014) argue, code-switching, or what they term "translanguaging," is a valuable resource that should be leveraged in the classroom.

In academic contexts, bilingual students may initially seem to lag behind monolingual peers. This phenomenon, known as the "bilingual lag," is typically temporary. A study by Hoff et al. (2012) found that while bilingual toddlers had smaller vocabularies in each individual language compared to monolingual peers, their total vocabulary size across both languages was comparable or larger. It is very important that school administrators and general education teachers be patient and maintain high expectations. However, they must also remember Hakuta et al.'s (2000) findings on the time required for language acquisition.

The key to success may well lie in home language maintenance. Maintaining the home language is not just culturally important; it's also academically beneficial. Cummins' (1979) linguistic independence hypothesis posits that skills developed in the first language can be transferred to the second language. This means that strong literacy skills in a student's home language can support English acquisition.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Thomas & Collier (2002) provides compelling evidence for this. They found that students who received sustained instruction in their home language alongside English eventually outperformed monolingual English speakers in academic achievement tests.

Language Brokering

Language brokering was first formally identified by researcher Lucy Tse (1995).

Tse describes the practice where bilingual children act as linguistic and cultural interpreters for their immigrant families. In short, they are their families cultural ambassadors. These young interpreters don't just translate words; they navigate complex social systems, decode cultural nuances, and shoulder adult responsibilities that can significantly impact their educational experience (Orellana, 2009).

There are both positive and negative aspects to young children placed in the role of a language broker. For example, the research by Weisskirch & Alva (2002) indicates that language brokers often develop advanced cognitive skills and cultural competency, but they may also experience academic challenges due to their family obligations. Valdes (2003) seems to agree and argues that these students possess unique gifts that often go unrecognized in traditional educational settings. Their ability to navigate between languages and cultures, handle complex social situations, and mediate adult interactions represents a form of intelligence that deserves acknowledgment and support.

Conversely, Morales & Hanson (2005) found that language brokers often experience stress from the responsibility of accurate translation, especially in high-stakes situations like medical appointments or legal proceedings. They might feel torn between their roles as students and family mediators, leading to increased anxiety and potential academic challenges.

School District of Philadelphia graduate, Alaha Abdul Faruq, shared her first-hand experience with language brokering on a panel titled the *Pros and Cons of Sheltered ESL in K-12* (Gonzalez et, al 2024).

Alaha shared that her family immigrated from Afghanistan, where she was born, to Russia. She lived there for 8 years. Then, they finally moved to Philadelphia.

Alaha explains,

I kind of had this picking up and moving to a different country twice. Now, the first time I did it, I was really young, so I kind of grew into the language, and so did my parents. There was never an issue of me translating for them or anything like that, but this time around, when we came to the United States, I'm still their translator for a lot of things. I was literally like an eight-year-old kid when I was translating IRS documents, which I still don't understand. So I think that's a shared experience between all immigrant children (Gonzalez et al., 2024).

Racial & Cultural Bias

Teacher bias against ESOL students can manifest in various forms, including linguistic bias, cultural bias, and racial bias. These biases are often unconscious and can significantly impact students' academic performance, self-esteem, and overall educational experience. August, et al (2014) argues that teacher perceptions of ESOL students can profoundly affect the academic opportunities afforded to these learners, potentially limiting their access to advanced coursework or gifted programs.

Tenenbaum & Ruck's (2007) synthesis of research findings revealed compelling evidence of the prevalence of teacher bias. Their study found that teachers often hold lower expectations for racial minority students. This is a category that encompasses many ESOL learners. These lowered expectations can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where students perform to the teacher's expected level rather than to their full potential.

Linguistic Bias

Everyone has biases. Everyone. This truth can be uncomfortable for educators, but not confronting personal biases can have a great impact on immigrant students. These biases, often unconscious, can significantly impact our ESOL students' educational experiences and outcomes. As Tenenbaum & Ruck's (2007) research revealed, teacher biases can manifest in lower expectations for racial minority students, including many ESOL learners.

Recent studies have illuminated the pervasive nature of bias in educational settings. According to Flores & Rosa (2015), linguistic bias manifests when teachers perceive ESOL students' language practices as deficient rather than different. Their research documents how this perception leads to the systematic undervaluation of students' linguistic resources and the imposition of rigid standard language norms that can hinder student progress.

The United States does not have an official language, yet many immigrants are commanded by some to “speak American!” American is not a language (Leung, K 2018). Moreover, most native English speakers who have studied a foreign language admit that studying a foreign language is very challenging, and they would not be comfortable traveling to a foreign land with the amount of foreign language that they know. Ironically, native English speakers receive praise for learning a second language, and immigrants receive social shame when they learn English as a second or third language. It is a double standard (Leung, K 2018).

Furthermore, Shapiro's (2014) extensive study in New York City schools revealed how linguistic bias can lead to the academic marginalization of ESOL students. The research documented cases where capable students were placed in lower academic tracks primarily due to language differences rather than academic ability. This tracking often resulted in reduced

academic opportunities and diminished student engagement. Karen Leung, a native Cantonese speaker and Western Washington University student, expressed her concerns about being considered English proficient.

It is shocking the kind of reactions and responses I get when people find out I'm bilingual and that English is my second language. Usually, my English proficiency is celebrated, but my native tongue is swept under the rug. I get compliments like “Your English is so good” and “You don't even have an accent,”; if those are compliments at all. Here's my question, why is it so important for me to speak perfect English? Would it make a difference if I spoke with an accent? What if I spoke it the way my parents do? Does my proficiency in one language really define my intelligence? What about the fact that I can speak two languages? You know, it actually takes an intelligent person to learn and master more than one language (Leung, K 2018).

There is much research to support Leung's (2018) experience with linguistic bias in educational settings. In fact, it has been well-documented. For example, a significant study by Flores & Rosa (2015) demonstrated how teachers often perceive ESOL students' language practices as deficient rather than different. Their analysis illuminates how this perception can lead to the undervaluation of students' linguistic resources and the imposition of rigid standard language norms.

Furthermore, Harklau's (2000) study in a California high school documented how linguistic bias affected student placement. She followed several immigrant students, including one Chinese student who, despite having a strong academic performance in her home country, was placed in low-track classes based primarily on limited English proficiency. This placement

decision, influenced by linguistic bias, significantly impacted the student's educational trajectory and self-perception.

Asset-based Mindset

Implementing culturally responsive teaching practices can significantly positively impact ESOL students' social-emotional well-being. This asset-based approach to teaching requires that educators abandon a focus on students' perceived limitations and weaknesses and expand their understanding of the strengths, assets, and funds of knowledge that students and their families possess (Arias, 2022).

This approach requires understanding and valuing the complexity of multilingual students, their communities, and multilingual parents' values and aspirations for their children.

An asset-based pedagogy views the diversity that students bring to the classroom, including culture, language, ableism, socio-economic status, immigration status, and sexuality, as characteristics that add value and strength to classrooms and communities (California Department of Education, 2021). Rather than attempting to ignore this diversity, an asset-based pedagogy requires students to be viewed in a new light and recognize that these characteristics can be a catalyst for learning (California Department of Education, 2021). Rather than attempting to ignore this diversity, an asset-based pedagogy requires viewing students in a new light, recognizing that

Harklau's (2000) study evidently shows that some participants with a poor self-perspective could have greatly benefited from teachers with an asset-based mindset when teaching ESOL students.

As Holi Goldenberg, a multilingual manager in the School District of Philadelphia, stated in a panel discussion titled “*Pros and Cons of Sheltered ESL in K-12*,” “just because “ Esol students “are not proficient in English doesn’t mean that they don’t bring a ton of awesome things into the classroom. They are bringing their own experiences with language, culture, and living in other countries” (Gonzalez et al., 2024).

Additionally, the effects of teacher bias extend beyond academic placement. Research by Shapiro (2014) on the experiences of immigrant students in New York City schools revealed that teacher bias could lead to feelings of alienation and disengagement among ESOL students. One student in Shapiro's study, a Dominican immigrant named Carlos, reported feeling "invisible" in his mainstream classes, where teachers rarely called on him or engaged with his contributions.

Addressing teacher bias requires a multifaceted approach. Villegas & Lucas (2007) emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching in mitigating bias and improving outcomes for diverse learners. This approach involves recognizing and valuing students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets rather than deficits.

Sondra Gonzalez, a School District of Philadelphia ESOL teacher and participant in the panel discussion, *Pros and Cons of Sheltered ESL in K-12*, shared,

Teachers need to understand just because someone is an ESL student doesn't mean that they're all the same, that they've had the same educational background and the same life experiences. To make blanket statements such as, “Oh, I've had ESL students before, so why isn't this one performing”? Just to make a relationship with your students get to know them because there are particular ways that ESL students are compared, and the

way that teachers are often comparing them is sometimes really not fair. Making that relationship is absolutely key (Gonzalez et al., 2024)

Moreover, professional development for teachers can be very helpful. For example, a fascinating year-long study by Mellom et al. (2018) followed 147 teachers who participated in monthly professional development focused on understanding and supporting ESOL students. What makes this study particularly interesting is that it shows real change in both teacher attitudes and student participation.

Teachers in the study learned specific strategies through monthly workshops and got feedback on their classroom teaching. The results were significant. Teachers who once insisted on "English-only" classrooms began to understand why allowing students to use their home language actually helps them learn English better. More importantly, when teachers changed their approach, they saw more ESOL students actively participating in class discussions.

One teacher in the study captured what many discovered: she realized that when she stopped viewing students' home languages as a problem and started seeing them as a resource, her ESOL students' English development actually accelerated. This finding is particularly powerful because it shows how changing our perspective can directly impact student success.

Supporting ESOL Students' Social and Emotional Growth

Acculturative stress represents a significant challenge for ESOL students in mainstream educational settings. According to Suárez-Orozco (2018), this phenomenon manifests as psychological and emotional pressure when students navigate their home culture and the new school environment. Berry (2006) explains that acculturative stress emerges through a complex process where students experience ongoing tension between cultural maintenance and adaptation to new cultural norms. This stress becomes particularly evident in educational settings where students must simultaneously manage academic demands while adjusting to unfamiliar cultural expectations.

Research by Suárez-Orozco reveals that students often exhibit various manifestations of this stress, including social withdrawal, anxiety during classroom interactions, and decreased academic engagement. Suárez-Orozco's (2008) and Berry's (2006) framework further illuminates how this stress impacts daily classroom experiences, from participation patterns to peer interactions, noting that students often feel caught between conflicting cultural values and behavioral expectations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, as Suárez-Orozco's studies demonstrate that unaddressed acculturative stress can significantly impact both academic performance and social-emotional well-being in the classroom environment (2018).

Furthermore, social and emotional stressors are often displayed academically in content-area learning, particularly in subjects like science and math, which rely heavily on abstract concepts and specialized terminology. Additionally, they may struggle with literacy skills, such as reading and writing, which often involve comprehending complex sentence

structures and decoding unfamiliar words (Short, 2012). Moreover, cultural differences can also pose obstacles, as students may be unfamiliar with classroom norms and expectations. For example, a student from a culture that values collective learning may hesitate to participate in individual work or group discussions (August & Shanahan, 2006).

In addition to academic issues, ESOL students must endure social obstacles. These obstacles usually concern cultural differences, misunderstandings, and misinterpretation of social cues, which can impact their ability to form meaningful peer relationships. For instance, a student from a culture that values indirect communication may struggle to express their needs or concerns in a direct manner, leading to social isolation.

Moreover, Limited English proficiency can prevent students from fully participating in peer interactions, leading to social isolation. Research by Kim et al. (2018) documented how ESOL students often experience feelings of frustration and embarrassment when unable to express themselves effectively, resulting in decreased classroom participation and peer engagement (Hofstede, G. (2010). In light of these factors, it makes sense that many ESOL students deal with trauma or separation anxiety related to immigration experiences. In fact, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2020) found that approximately 58% of immigrant students reported symptoms of anxiety or depression related to family separation or adaptation challenges.

For example, Fadi Kharban graduated from the School District of Philadelphia. He is currently a pre-med major at Drexel University. Fadi shared in a panel discussion titled *The Pros and Cons of Sheltered ESL in K-12*, that his experience in school was not mostly positive. “There was a language barrier between the English speakers and the non-English speakers that created great disconnection. There was a misconnection that happens” (Gonzalez et al., 2024). That was

the majority of his bad experiences. Fadi adds, “ You just don’t know what’s going around. And you’re like what’s going on, and you just keep hearing voices that are not making sense, and you’re feeling like I don’t know what I am doing.”(Gonzalez et al., 2024).

Classroom Activities

Introduction

This five-day unit transforms beginning English learners into confident digital storytellers. While students may enter with limited English proficiency, they will discover that their voices matter and their stories have power. The unit deliberately moves from analyzing others' stories to creating personal narratives, using technology as a bridge to overcome language barriers.

Unit Overview

Each lesson runs 60 minutes, building systematically from receptive to productive language skills. The unit incorporates multiple modalities, which include visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital to support English learners at WIDA levels 1.0-1.8. This level is geared towards newcomers with minimum English skills in grades 6-8. However, this unit can be adapted for any grade or WIDA level. Students will progress from simple story comprehension to creating their own digital narratives.

Essential Understanding for Teachers

Before beginning this unit, understand that our goal is not perfect English but rather authentic expression. Beginning English learners often have rich, complex stories but lack the English vocabulary to share them. Our digital tools and visual supports will help bridge this gap.

Lesson 1: The Arrival

Background Information

This lesson focuses on building confidence with both storytelling and basic technology skills. The emphasis is on participation and communication rather than perfect English. The teacher should celebrate all attempts at expression, whether through gestures, L1 (first language), drawings, or emerging English.

Essential Questions:

- How do our personal stories help us connect with others?
- How can we tell our stories when we are learning a new language?
- How do images help us share our experiences and feelings?

Materials:

- Book: "The Arrival" by Shaun Tan



- Regular paper folded into thirds (one per student)
- sticky notes
- Google Translate (as needed)

- Smartboard to project pictures
- Student Chromebook with Google Slides application
- Word wall of emotions with pictures
- key vocabulary charts and language frames reference sheet for the students

Key Vocabulary Chart			
Technology Words	Support Vocabulary (for Visuals)	Emotions (with Visuals)	Descriptive
club	people	school	fun
swims	friend	swim	big/cool
love	teacher	classroom	good
image	hand	background	bad
	student		

Key Vocabulary Chart		
Emotions	Actions	Sequence Words
happy/sad	run/came	first
scared/afraid	fell	then
excited	play	last/finally
nervous	help	

Sentences/Frames/Language Frames Chart		
Beginning Level	Emerging Level	More Advanced
"I see ____"	"First, I ____"	"I feel ____ because ____"
"I feel ____"	"Then, I ____"	"This reminds me of ____"
"This is ____"	"Finally, I ____"	"So my story ____"

- Optional: Basic drawing supplies

Key Vocabulary (pre-teach)

All vocabulary should be taught with visuals, gestures, and examples from "The Arrival" or student experiences.

Content Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify three main events in sequential order from "The Arrival" using pictures
2. Match basic emotions to character expressions in story images
3. Create a simple 3-slide digital story showing the beginning, middle, and end

Language Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Name three basic emotions (sad, scared, happy) to describe the character's feelings

2. Use sequence words (first, then, finally) with visual support to order story events
3. Produce simple sentences using frames: "I see..." and "He feels..." to describe images
4. Label digital slides with basic emotion words from the word bank

Introduction- Lesson 1 (2 Days)

Begin by gathering students to the smartboard. Display the first image from "The Arrival," showing the father with his suitcase looking at his family. This powerful image sets up the emotional core of our lesson.

Model the language patterns students will use: Point to the image and say clearly, "I see a father. He feels worried because he must leave." The teacher will have the students repeat these patterns, accepting approximations and native language contributions.

Guided Practice

The teacher will move to the core story sequence by displaying three key images from the book: the family goodbye, arrival in the strange city, and meeting a helpful person. These images create a clear narrative arc that students can follow.

Teacher:

Distribute paper folded into thirds to each student.

Students:

Working in pairs or triads, students will:

1. Draw simple sketches of the three scenes in sequence
2. Label each scene with an emotion word from the word bank

3. Add any words they know using sticky notes

4. Practice telling their partner what happens using "First... Then... Finally..."

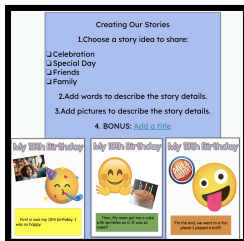
The teacher will circulate and offering vocabulary as needed. Accept gestures, L1(first language) , and single-word responses as students work to express their understanding.

Digital Creation

Transition to the digital portion of the lesson.

The teacher will guide students to:

1. Open Google Slides on their devices and teach procedures
2. Teacher will present her google presentation about a personal experience.



Students will now use three slides to tell their own stories. The stories could be about immigration or anything that they feel comfortable sharing.

3. Make three slides corresponding to their paper sequence

4. Add one emotion word and a simple face to each slide. More advanced students can write one-three sentences per slide. Students can use Google images or their own personal photographs for the slides. Ensure the sentences discuss their feelings and emotions about the experience on each slide.

5. Type one word, sentence or phrase describing what is happening on the slide

*Provide step-by-step guidance for the technology. Have tech-savvy students help others. Keep the digital task simple and achievable within the timeframe.

Closure

Sharing Time:

1. Turn to a partner
2. Show their favorite slide
3. Say one feeling word they learned

Or have students present their presentations to the class.

Assessment

1. Completion of Google Slide Project
2. Each slide has an image, a different image on each slide, and word labels.
3. Each slide should be in a logical sequence order that makes sense.

Lesson 2 The Name Jar (2 days)

Background Information

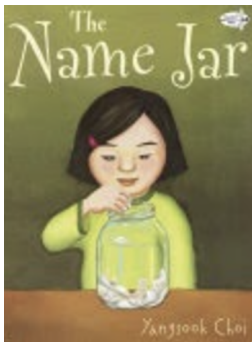
"The Name Jar" is an ideal text for WIDA Level 1.0-1.8 students because it combines strong visual support with a universally relatable theme. Through clear illustrations, students can understand the story's emotions and events even with limited English proficiency. The main character's experience as a newcomer mirrors many ESOL students' own journeys, allowing them to make personal connections despite language barriers. The book's school setting is familiar, and the emotional journey of feeling different, then finding acceptance, resonates across cultures. The story's simple, repetitive patterns and predictable structure support emerging English skills, while the focus on names and identity validates students' cultural experiences. Most importantly, the visual storytelling through facial expressions, body language, and sequential events helps students comprehend the narrative without relying heavily on text. This combination of accessible storytelling, cultural validation, and visual support makes it an effective tool for building both language skills and classroom community with newcomer students.

Essential Questions

1. How do our names tell stories about who we are?
2. Why do our feelings about belonging matter?
3. How can we show respect for each other's names and stories?

Materials:

Book: "The Name Jar" by Yangsook Choi



- Name Jar Story Map
- Word wall (include pictures)
- Drawing supplies
- Sentence/Language frames on display: The character feels ____, In the story ____, I see _
- Student whiteboards, dry-erase markers, and erasers
- Google Translate (as needed)

Word Wall Chart

Story Words	Feeling Words
name	happy
special	scared
friend	proud
school	worried
new	glad
choose	

Content Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the main character's feelings using visual clues from the story
2. Sequence 3 main events from the story using the Name Jar Story Map
3. Make personal connections to the character's experiences
4. Create simple responses to story themes

Language Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Use 3-5 feeling words to describe the character's emotions (scared, happy, proud)
2. Complete sentence frames: "The character feels ___" and "In the story ___"
3. Respond to simple questions about the story using single words or phrases
4. Label story events using word bank support

Opening

Teacher:

- Shows own name written in English
- Shares simple story about own name's meaning/significance
- Models: "My name is _____. In my family, my name means _____."

Students will:

- Listen and observe
- Using a whiteboard and markers, student will write their names in their home language and English
- Draw something meaningful (an experience, a feeling, a memory) to them about their names
- Share if they wish

Story Reading

Teacher Reading Strategies:

1. Show cover: "What do you see?"
2. Point to main character: "How does she feel?"
3. Stop at key moments:
 - When Unhei arrives at new school
 - When she discovers the name jar
 - When she makes her decision

Students Respond By:

- Using thumbs up/down for feelings
- Pointing to similar experiences
- Drawing quick pictures of key moments
- Showing understanding through gestures

Name Jar Story Map

The Name Jar

Name _____

Who are the characters?

Where did the story take place?

First

Then

Finally

What happened?

● Complete story map

- Drawing pictures
- Adding feeling faces
- Using word bank labels
- Writing simple words
- Using L1 if needed (first language)

Assessment

1. Story comprehension through pointing/gestures
2. Vocabulary use attempts
3. Participation level (according to comfort)
4. Story map completion

Lesson 3 Creating Our Digital Stories (3 days)

Background Information

Digital storytelling provides beginning ESOL students with a powerful way to share their voices despite limited English. By combining images, basic words, and simple sequencing, students can tell meaningful stories without the pressure of complex language production. This activity builds confidence by allowing students to use their existing tech skills while developing new English vocabulary. Most importantly, it validates students' experiences and gives them an accessible way to participate in classroom storytelling, helping them feel part of the classroom community while developing essential language and digital literacy skills.

Essential Questions

- How do pictures help us tell our stories?
- What makes a story meaningful to others?
- How can we share our experiences using digital tools?

Content Objectives

SWBAT

1. Select a personal story to share
2. Create a 3-slide digital presentation
3. Choose images that match their story
4. Show story sequence (beginning, middle, end)

Language Objectives

SWBAT

1. Write simple labels using word bank
2. Use sequence words (first, then, finally)
3. Express basic feelings with emojis
4. Share story using simple phrases

Materials

- Computers/Chromebooks with Google Slide application
- Personal Stories handout
- Google Translate (as needed)

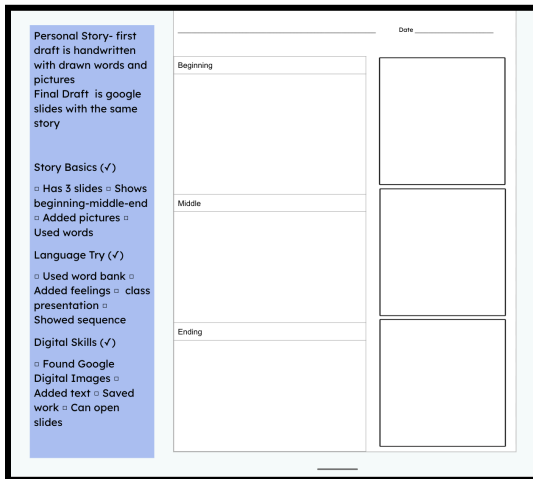
Opening

This lesson has two parts: handwritten and digital.

Personal Story- The first draft is handwritten with words and pictures

The Final Draft is Google Slides with the same story.

The teacher will display her completed handwritten personal story template on the smartboard. The teacher will discuss story topic choices, basic slide structure, and helper words.



Direct Instruction

After the handwritten story template is completed, the teacher will demonstrate to students how to transfer the same story idea to digital Google Slides format. Students can use Google Images to take pictures.

Students

Students will create three sequenced slides that contain the following:

Story Basics (✓)

- Has 3 slides
- Shows beginning-middle-end
- Added pictures
- Used words

Language Try (✓)

- Used word bank
- Added feelings
- class presentation
- Showed sequence

Digital Skills (✓)

- Found Google Digital Images
- Added text
- Saved work
- Can open slides

Sharing

Present the project to the class or with partners

Assessment

Story Basics (✓)

- Has 3 slides
- Shows beginning-middle-end
- Added pictures
- Used words

Language Try (✓)

- Used word bank
- Added feelings
- class presentation
- Showed sequence

Digital Skills (✓)

- Found Google Digital Images
- Added text
- Saved work
- Can open slides

Lesson 4 Making Our Stories Come Alive (2 Days)

Background Information

Essential Questions

- How can we add our voice to our stories?
- What makes a story interesting to listen to?
- How can we help others understand our stories?

Materials

Chromebooks

Headphones

Google Slides application

Vocaroo (voice recording app)

[Adding Audio/Voice Clips to Google Slides With Vocaroo](#)

(for teacher tech support)

Content Objectives

SWBAT

1. Record simple narration for their stories
2. Add appropriate sound effects or music
3. Practice telling the story before recording
4. Revise based on peer feedback

Language Objectives

SWBAT

1. Record one sentence per slide
2. Practice keywords before recording (handout from lesson 1)
3. Use sequence words (beginning, middle, end)
4. Express feelings with basic phrases

Lesson Overview

In this fourth lesson, students take their digital stories (created in Lesson 3) and add their voices and simple sounds to make them more engaging. This step transforms their stories from simple slides with pictures into true digital storytelling presentations. Students will use the recording feature from Vocaroo and insert their voice recordings into their Google Slides.

When students add their voices, they will make their stories alive for their audience.

Flow of Lesson

The lesson begins with the teacher modeling how to voice record on the Vocaroo app and insert it on Google Slides. Using a sample story, the teacher shows how to click the record button, speak clearly, and add the recording to a slide. Students then practice their words with a partner before recording, ensuring they know what they want to say for each slide. The class will be set up with different areas: quiet recording spaces for students ready to record, practice corners for those who need more preparation, and a help desk for technical support.

Recording Process

Students work at their own pace, moving through these steps:

1. Practice their words with a partner
2. Find a quiet recording spot
3. Record their voice for each slide

4. Listen and re-record if needed
5. Add simple sounds (clapping, music) if they want
6. Save their work

Assessment

Completion of voiced Google Slide presentation

Lesson 5 Making Our Stories Move (2 Days)

Background Information

In this final lesson, students take their 3-slide stories and make them more dynamic using Google Slides.

The lesson starts with the teacher showing how to make simple but effective changes: adding a title slide that says "My Story About..." with the student's name, putting transitions between slides, making important words stand out by changing their size and color, and creating a final Thank You slide. Then students work with partners to make these changes to their own stories. Students can also add more text to their stories. They'll adjust their existing voice recordings to match any new changes, check that everything flows well, and help each other fix any problems. The key is keeping it simple but making the stories look more polished than regular slides. All the changes are easy to make but make a big difference in how the stories look and feel when presented. Every story will have a clear beginning (title), smooth movement between slides (transitions), standout words (text changes), and a proper ending (final slide). This makes their work feel more complete and professional.

Essential Questions

- How do transitions help tell our stories?
- Why do design elements matter?
- How can we make our stories more interesting to watch?

Materials

- Chromebooks with Google Slide application
- Student stories (from previous lessons)
- Vocaroo application
- Google Translate (as needed)

Content Objectives:

SWBAT

- Create an engaging title and ending slides
- Add appropriate transitions between slides
- Format text to emphasize key story elements
- Apply design elements that enhance their story

Language Objectives

SWBAT

- Use descriptive words in titles
- Apply transition vocabulary (first, then, finally)
- Read and follow tech directions
- Give and receive simple feedback

Opening

Teacher Shows:

- How to add transitions (Slide-Transition)
- Change text color/size
- Add title slide
- Create ending slide

Work Time

Students Make Changes:

1. Title Slide

- "My Story About..."
- Name
- Simple design

2. Story Slides

- Add simple transitions
- Make important words bigger
- Choose colors for feelings
- Check timing with voice

3. Ending

- "The End" or "Thank You"
- Name again
- Date
- Simple design

Partner Check

Watch your partner's story:

- Do transitions work?
- Can you hear the voice?
- See words clearly?
- Looks finished?

Final Share

- Share the presentation with the class

Teaching Strategies

Lesson 1: The Arrival

REMEMBER	Point to main events
UNDERSTAND	Show sequence order
APPLY	Find story patterns
ANALYZE	Find story patterns
EVALUATE	Choose important parts
CREATE	Make their own map

Lesson 2: The Name Jar

REMEMBER	Match feelings to faces
UNDERSTAND	Show why characters feel that way
APPLY	Connect to your own experiences
ANALYZE	Compare responses with peers
EVALUATE	Select the best evidence
CREATE	Demonstrate understanding using a variety of modalities

Lesson 3: Creating Our Digital Stories

REMEMBER	Follow basic step-by-step directions
UNDERSTAND	Choose the right pictures
APPLY	Make 3 Google Slides
ANALYZE	Check if the story makes sense

EVALUATE:	Select the best Google images for their stories
CREATE	Build a digital story

Lesson 4 Making Our Stories Come Alive

REMEMBER	Learn recording steps
UNDERSTAND	Practice words first
APPLY	Record simple phrases
ANALYZE	Listen to clarity
EVALUATE	Choose the best recording
CREATE	Add voice to the story

Lesson 5: Making Our Stories Move

REMEMBER:	Point to basic tools in Google Slides
UNDERSTAND	Connect design to story meaning
APPLY	Add transitions that flow naturally
ANALYZE	Compare different transition effects
EVALUATE	Decide on final improvements
CREATE:	Make a smooth-flowing story

Resources

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Reading List for Students

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Appendix

The Arrival - Lesson 1: Visual Storytelling

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Reading Standards for Literature 6-8

- RL.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.6.7: Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text.

Speaking and Listening Standards 6-8

- SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners
- SL.6.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats

WIDA ELD Standards Framework 2020 Edition

ELD Standard 1

English learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting

Level 1 Entering:

- Use visual support to communicate ideas
- Point to pictures showing the sequence of events
- Match labels to images
- Respond with gestures

ELD Standard 2

English learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in Language Arts

Level 1 Can Do Descriptors:

- Identify story elements using visuals
- Match pictures with labels/words
- Sequence pictures to show story order

The Name Jar - Lesson 2: Reading & Listening to Stories

Grade 6-8 | WIDA Level (1.0-1.8)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Reading Standards for Literature 6-8

- RL.6.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details
- RL.6.3: Describe how a particular story's plot unfolds in a series of episodes
- RL.6.7: Compare and contrast the experience of reading a text to viewing multimedia versions

Speaking and Listening Standards 6-8

- SL.6.1: Engage effectively in collaborative discussions
- SL.6.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats
- SL.6.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically

Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition

ELD Standard 1

Social and Instructional Language:

- Respond to simple questions about text
- Show understanding through gestures/pointing
- Match emotions to story events
- Use L1 to demonstrate comprehension

ELD Standard 2

Language of Language Arts: Level 1 Can Do Descriptors:

- Identify the main character's feelings using visual support

- Match pictures to events in the story
- Use single words/short phrases to describe story elements
- Draw and label pictures from the story

Lesson 3: Creating Digital Stories

Grade 6-8 WIDA (Level 1.0-1.8)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Writing Standards 6-8

- W.6.3: Write narratives to develop real experiences or events using effective technique
- W.6.6: Use technology to produce and publish writing
- W.6.5: Develop and strengthen writing through planning

Speaking and Listening Standards 6-8

- SL.6.5: Include multimedia components in presentations
- SL.6.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically

WIDA ELD Standards Framework 2020 Edition

ELD Standard 1

Social and Instructional Language:

- Create visual representations of experiences
- Label images with single words/phrases
- Sequence events using pictures
- Use digital tools with support

Lesson 4: Adding Voice to Our Stories

Grade 6-8 WIDA Level (1.0-1.8)

Common Core State Standards

Speaking and Listening Standards 6-8

- SL.6.4: Present claims and findings
- SL.6.5: Include multimedia components
- SL.6.6: Adapt speech to variety of contexts

Writing Standards 6-8

- W.6.6: Use technology to produce and publish writing

WIDA ELD Standards Framework 2020 Edition

ELD Standard 1

Social and Instructional Language:

- Record simple statements about experiences
- Practice pronunciation of key words
- Use digital tools to share ideas
- Express basic emotions through voice

Lesson 5: Making Stories Move

Grade 6-8 (WIDA Level 1.0-1.8)

Common Core State Standards

Speaking and Listening Standards 6-8

- SL.6.5: Include multimedia components in presentations
- SL.6.6: Adapt speech to variety of contexts
- SL.6.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically

Writing Standards 6-8

- W.6.6: Use technology to produce and publish writing
- W.6.5: Develop and strengthen writing through revision

WIDA ELD Standards Framework 2020 Edition

ELD Standard 1

Social and Instructional Language:

- Apply formatting to enhance meaning
- Follow multi-step tech directions
- Give and receive peer feedback
- Make final adjustments based on feedback

ELD Standard 2

Language of Language Arts: Level 1 Can Do Descriptors:

- Enhance visual presentations
- Apply basic design elements
- Follow the demonstration of tech tools
- Complete the final product with support

Creating Our Stories

1. Choose a story idea to share:

- Celebration
- Special Day
- Friends
- Family

2. Add words to describe the story details.

3. Add pictures to describe the story details.

4. BONUS: [Add a title](#)

<p>Birthday</p>  <p>My 10th birthday. I</p>	<p>My 10th Birthday</p>  <p>Then, My mom got me a cake with sprinkles on it. It was so sweet!</p>	<p>My 10th Birth</p>  <p>Fin the end, we went to a place! I played a lot!!!!</p>
--	--	---

My 10th Birthday



First it was my 10th birthday. I was so happy.

My 10th Birthday



Then, my mom got me a cake with sprinkles on it. It was so sweet!

My 10th Birthday



In the end, we went to a fun place! I played a lot!!!!

The Name Jar

Name _____

Who are the
characters?

--

Where did the story
take place?

--

First

Then

Finally

--	--	--

What happened?

_____ Date _____

Beginning

--

--

Middle

--

--

Ending

--

--

Key Vocabulary Chart

Technology Words	Support Vocabulary (use visuals)	Places (use visuals)	Descriptive
click	people	school	new
search	friend	home	big/small
save	teacher	classroom	good
image	family	playground	bad
	student		

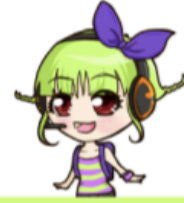
Key Vocabulary Chart

Emotions	Actions	Sequence Words
happy/sad	look/see	first
scared/afraid	feel	then
excited	play	last/finally
nervous	help	

Sentence/Frames/Language Frames Chart

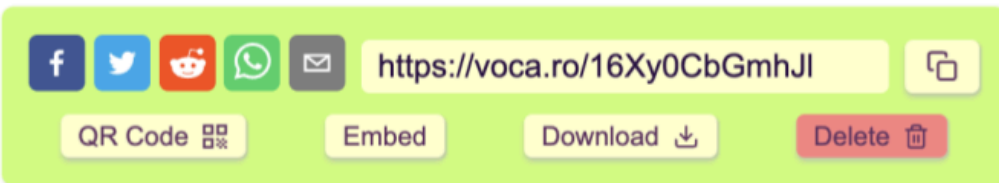
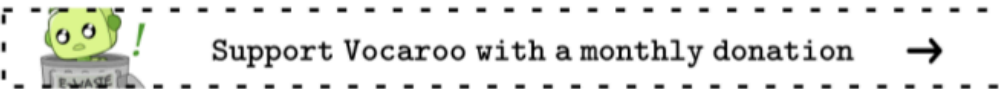
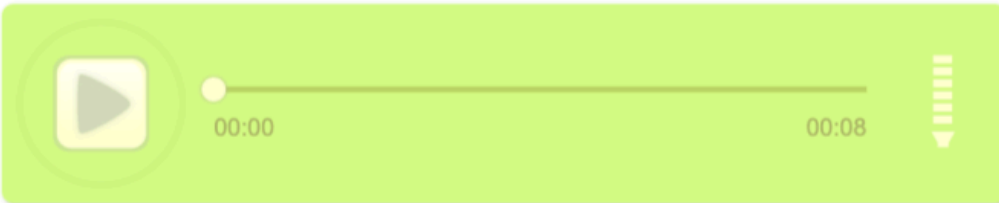
Beginning Level	Emerging Level	More Advanced
"I see ___"	"First, I ___"	"I feel ___ because ___"
"I feel ___"	"Then, I ___"	"This reminds me of ___"
"This is ___"	"Finally, I ___"	"In my story, ___"

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