

Unit 4: Understanding the U.S. School System

Teachers' Guide

LESSON 1: Introducing the U.S. Public School System

FOR MORE INFORMATION TO HELP YOU ANSWER QUESTIONS THAT MAY COME UP DURING THIS LESSON, REFER TO THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SHEET "LEGAL INFORMATION ABOUT U.S. SCHOOLS" AT THE END OF THIS LESSON.

Time: 2 hours

Content Objectives

- Students discuss the particular challenges immigrant children face in U.S. schools.
- Students examine the difficulties involved in supporting school-aged immigrant learners in U.S. public schools.

Rights Objectives

- Students familiarize themselves with and discuss the universal right to education in the United States, regardless of perceived national origin, citizenship, or immigration status.

Language Objectives

- Students continue to build their language skills around rights
- Students practice reading, writing, and speaking in English.

Materials Needed:

- Student lesson plan
- Internet or downloaded video (optional):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CQ61S10QrM>.
- Computer projector (optional)

KEY VOCABULARY:

Nouns	Verbs
Right	To educate
School	To understand
Access	To trust
Expectation	To inform
System	To need
Orientation	To hope

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LESSON ACTIVITIES:

PART A) Rights of Access to U.S. Public Schools

The instructor should present the information below on children’s right of access to public education in the U.S. and invite students to ask questions about this right. In the discussion, pose the following four questions, writing on the board two to four answers from students per question.

“All children in the United States are entitled to **equal access** to a public elementary and secondary education, regardless of their or their parents’ actual or perceived **national origin, citizenship, or immigration status.**”

United States Department of Education, 2015

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/unaccompanied-children.pdf>

- Why do you think education is important for children?
- What are your hopes for your children, or children you know, at school?
- In the U.S., who do you believe has a right to attend primary and secondary school?
- Why might some immigrant children or children of immigrants feel afraid or be unable to attend public school?

PART B) Talking about Schools and Immigrant and Refugee Families

While preparing for class, the instructor should watch before the following video about immigrant families in Canadian schools, produced by the John Humphries Centre for Peace and Human Rights, a Canadian human rights organization:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CQ61S100rM>. Family members describe what it was like to learn about their school system. It is not necessary to show the video to the class. If the instructor does show the video, they should clarify for the class that the interviewees are describing the Canadian and not the U.S. American school system.

In class, review the three quotes selected from the video with students. Break students into small groups to talk about immigrant families’ experiences with North American schools, their own knowledge.

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Review the following quotes from a video about immigrant and refugee families in Canada, produced by the John Humphries Centre for Peace and Human Rights, a Canadian human rights organization. Family members describe what it was like to learn about another country's school system as an immigrant or refugee parent.



“Unfortunately... the schools really do not provide an orientation for parents to get to know the expectations of the school.”



“For many refugee and immigrant parents... going to the school means you don't trust the teachers enough to educate your children.”



“[Immigrants] need to be educated, because the system here is really not the same as the system back home.”

Get in small groups, and pretend that your group has been asked to make a video about your experience with U.S. schools. Take turns reading and responding to the following prompts. If you would like, take notes about your answers in the space provided.

- What do you know from your experience about U.S. schools? _____

- What do you want to learn about U.S. schools? _____

- What do you want people who work at U.S. schools to know about immigrants?

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PART C) Reflections

The instructor should invite students to share their answers to the final question from Part B, What do you would want people who work at U.S. schools to know about immigrants and refugees? Record students' ideas on the board. Then, invite students to brainstorm how teachers or administrators in schools could learn about immigrant and refugee families, using the questions below as a guide.

As a class, discuss your answers to the following questions, considering your experiences and those of people you know who are immigrants.

- What do you want people who work at U.S. schools to know about immigrants?
- What are some reasons that people who work in U.S. schools may not be informed about the experiences, interests, and needs of immigrant families?
- How could people who work in U.S. schools learn more about immigrant families?

END OF LESSON REFLECTIONS: The teacher asks students at the end of each lesson what they learned and how they felt doing these activities. The teacher may want to take notes based on what students share to help in preparing the lesson for the following week.

Guiding questions for instructors to pose to students include the following:

- What new ideas/content did you learn?
- What new vocabulary did you learn?
- What new rights did you learn?
- What was difficult? What was easy?
- How did you feel?
- What would you change?
- How would you use this information?
- How does this content connect to human rights?
- What situations can you think of when you may want to assert your rights?

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FAQ: LEGAL INFORMATION ABOUT U.S. SCHOOLS

❖ How did the American school system come to be the way it is?

Early in American history schooling was only available for the wealthy. However, starting in the 1830s, the Common Schools movement began with the goal of providing a universal education. By start of the 20th century, almost all children received schooling that focused on reading, writing and arithmetic until the 8th grade. Schools were used to assimilate the millions of immigrants who were coming into the United States during this time. In the 20th century, schools were seen as the foundation of our citizenry and economy. There were movements to improve the quality of math and science instruction, and ensure all students were achieving at grade level. American schools became battlegrounds for social and intellectual movements and hot button issues, such as civil rights and desegregation, Communism, and free speech. Even today what we teach in schools and the quality of different schools is controversial and complicated.

❖ Where does the right to an education in the U.S. come from?

The Constitution of United States does not include the right to an education. Instead, the right to an education is given by the states. Every state constitution grants the right to a free public primary education (i.e., kindergarten – grade 4/5/6) for children in the state. The 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution provides that “No State shall ... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protections of the laws.” Thus, since access to education is part of the law in every state and the 14th Amendment requires that the law protect everyone equally, no state can deny an education to children in the state. See the various state constitution education clauses: <http://pabararc.org/pdf/Molly%20Hunter%20Article.pdf>

❖ Who has a right to an education in the U.S.?

All children in a given state have a right to a public school education. There have been several cases to reach the Supreme Court which affirm children’s rights to an education. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) held that it was unconstitutional for children to be in separate schools based on race. *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) held that schools violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by discriminating on the basis of national origin where they did not provide English language instruction or support to Chinese students who did not speak English. *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) held that the undocumented immigrant children had a right to education within the state because of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

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January 2016

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