

LATINO AMERICANS

Stories of Arrival: Emergence of Latino Americans

Lesson Overview

Latinos have come to be part of the United States through many different avenues: immigrants seeking a better life, refugees driven by war and those who did not move at all, but who found themselves on the other side of redefined borders as the United States expanded. Students will document details of historical characters from the program and plot their movements on a **map**. In this activity, students will trace firsthand, the varied stories of becoming Latino in the United States — and dispel common generalizations. In addition, they will compare and contrast these stories with the arrival experiences of their own families.

Grade: 4 – 12+

Time: Variable, 1 – 2 class periods (Suggested companion lesson: *Digging at the Roots of My Family Tree*)

Materials:

Video Clips (*Eligio Peña, Carlos Vaquerano, Journey From Mexico, Puerto Rico to New York, Gustavo Firmat, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Bernardo Vega, Julia Alvarez*)

- **Map** of North America
- **Stories of Arrival Organizer**

Lesson Objectives

- Analyze diverse stories of becoming part of the United States.*
- Explore the narratives of Latinos from various nations of origin.
- Contextualize personal stories with broader historical events, including U.S. expansion and political and economic change in the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico. Assign human faces and experiences to geopolitical change.
- Problematize the question of “Who is American?” by challenging stereotypical notions of Latino arrival to the United States and comparing and contrasting personal experiences with those of historical characters.
- Reinforce geographical knowledge of the Americas and migration routes between Latin America and the United States.

***Note:** The term “becoming American” has been used in reference to experiences of immigration. While the term is accurate on many levels, it can be frustrating to

some. Consider including your students in a discussion of why groups coming to the United States from other parts of the Americas might take issue with this term.

Lesson Procedure

Using the video clips, students investigate the stories of arrival of at least four of the individuals or families from **Latino Americans**. Using the **Stories of Arrival Organizer**, they record the narrative of each character (dates, locations of origin and of arrival and story details). Next, they chart the movement of the characters on the **map** and respond to the reflection questions through independent writing or in group discussion.

- Eligio Peña
- Carlos Vaquerano
- Juan Villaseñor
- Juanita (Ortiz) Sanabria
- Gustavo Pérez Firmat
- Francisca & Mariano Vallejo
- Bernardo Vega
- Julia Alvarez

Reflection Questions

- How are the stories you studied different from each other?
- How are the stories similar?
- Based on your research, is it possible to suggest there is a single narrative that explains how Latinos came to the United States? Explain, citing examples from the video clips.
- What are some of the important national or international events that are linked to the experiences of the individuals you chose? In other words, how do these personal stories represent broader historical trends of political or economic change in the Americas?
- Why might Puerto Ricans in particular take issue with being perceived as immigrants?
- Do you know your own family's story of arrival to the United States? If not, what would you presume about that arrival experience? How might the experience of the characters from **Latino Americans** be similar or different to your family's story of arrival?
- What are some of the stereotypes about when and how Latinos have come to the United States? In what ways do the stories challenge stereotypes about Latinos and how they have arrived in this country?

EXTENSION I: From Many Shores

Latino Americans explores the experiences of Latinos in the United States through the stories of its largest groups: Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Cuban Americans, Central Americans and Dominican Americans. What are some of the other nations or cultures of origins of American Latinos? Research the stories of arrival from one of these locations. Create a travel log and/or map to document the story you discover.