

“Immersion” Lesson Plan

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Grades: 3 - 5

Themes: English as a Second Language (ESL), language difficulties, math, bullying, immigration

Common Core State Standards (Grades 3-5)

Grade 3

Writing

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

Speaking and Listening

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners on grade 3-5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
2. Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

Grade 4

Writing

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

Speaking and Listening

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners on grade 3-5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

2. Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

Grade 5

Writing

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

Speaking and Listening

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners on grade 3-5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

2. Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.

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Film Title: *Immersion*

Running time: 14 minutes

Brief Synopsis:

Ten-year-old Moises has just immigrated to California from Mexico. He doesn't speak English, but he's good at math, so he hopes to do well on his first math test in the USA. **Immersion** plunges its audience into the visceral experience of a child who cannot understand his teacher. (Richard Levien, USA, 14 min.)

Objectives

- Students will discuss the difficulties that non-English speakers face in the classroom
- Students will discuss how bullying affects other students
- Students will generate ideas for helping Moises and other struggling students succeed

Vocabulary

Immersion – being surrounded by something, such as another language

Immigrant – a person who moves to a new country

Culture – the attitudes, behavior and customs of a group of people

Bilingual – someone who speaks two languages fluently

Resident – someone who lives in a particular place

Before Viewing Activities

- List and discuss some of the struggles that children who migrate to the USA face in the classroom.
- Ask if anyone has ever struggled understanding another language or noticed another student struggling with language.
- Review the questions with students so they have some sense of what to look for during the film.

During Viewing

After Moises and Gerardo talk about skipping the test and going to get ice cream, pause the film.

Ask students to discuss with a partner and predict if Moises will skip the test. What will happen to him in the short term and long term if he skips the test? What would you do?

After Viewing Questions

Have students discuss or write answers to some or all of the following questions.

1. Is Moises good at math? How do you know?
2. Why was Moises confused about the blocks?
3. When did Moises realize he was going to have difficulty with the math test? Why was he going to have difficulty?
4. Why do you think the director chose to show the words in the math problem floating around?
5. Why do you think the teacher's voice is distorted when we first hear Moises listening to her? How do you think the filmmakers made her voice sound that way?
6. Why did Moises keep repeating “40”?
7. How did Moises feel after he repeated “40” several times?
8. Why did the teacher try to find Moises a math test in Spanish?
9. Why couldn't Moises take the test in Spanish?
10. What was interesting about the Principal's conversation with the janitor?
11. Why did Moises stop playing kickball?
12. What was significant about Enrique throwing trash on the ground in front of Moises' brother Luis?
13. What happened in the flashback that Moises has when he was in the bathroom considering skipping the math test? What do you think the purpose was of the flashback?
14. Where was the fence scene supposed to be? How do you think the filmmakers filmed the fence scene?
15. Why did Moises choose to do the math test? What would you have done?
16. Do you think Moises will do well on the test? If not, do you think it means that he is not good at math?

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17. Was Ms. Peterson a good teacher? Why or why not?
18. What could have made her a better teacher? Why didn't she do these things?
19. Why do you think the filmmakers made this film?

Writing Prompts

1. What do you think will happen to Moises in the next few years? Support your viewpoint with reasons from what you know about Moises, his family and his school.
2. What do you think other students could have done to help Moises? What can you do to help students who struggle with language or academics at your school? What can you do to stop bullies from teasing these students?
3. Do you think this is an important story to share? Why or why not? What can we learn from this film?

Extension Activity

Charades - Have students act out the following words without using any language.

Escalator, skateboard, microwave, cellphone, recycling bin.

Discuss the importance of language in school and society for communicating with others. What would be the most difficult for you in school and outside of school if you didn't speak English?

Read Alouds

My American Dream by Yuliana Gallegos

La Mariposa by Francisco Jimenez

Pepita Talks Twice by Ofelia Dumas Lachtman

The Upside-Down Boy by Juan Felipe Herrera

My Diary from Here to There by Amada Irma Perez

A Place Where Sunflowers Grow by Amy Lee-Tai

My Name is Maria Isabel by Alma Flor Ada

My Name Is Jorge: On Both Sides of the River by Jane Medina

If your students produce any work based on this film, please consider sending us samples for our files, to Richard Levien, richard.levien@gmail.com or 7 Capp Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

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Director’s Statement (why we made the film)

We should replace bilingual education with immersion in English so people learn the common language of the country and they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto. - Newt Gingrich, March 31, 2007

How to educate new arrivals in the USA is a hotly debated topic. But the debate rarely considers the personal stories of new immigrants. Three years ago, producer Zareen Levien was volunteering in a 5th grade classroom. For months a boy sat at the back, not participating at all. Like 25% of Californian children, he was an English Language Learner (ELL). He had just arrived from Mexico and didn’t speak any English. The teacher was excellent, but didn’t speak Spanish. In a public school class with 30 students, she had little time to spend with him.

California’s policy of “structured English immersion” allows this boy only 1 year of additional English language instruction. After that, he’s expected to be at the same level as his classmates. Research indicates that it takes 5-7 years to develop academic English fluency.

"Immersion" shows a bright boy who, for no fault of his own, is sinking. The film aims to start conversations about educating immigrant children, and to give people who may have no experience of trying to learn in another language, an insight into how difficult this can be.

Resources for ELL

1. For teachers: **Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD)** is a model of professional development in the area of language acquisition and literacy. The strategies and model promote English language acquisition, academic achievement, and cross-cultural skills. GLAD was developed and field tested for nine years in the Fountain Valley School District and is based on years of experience with integrated approaches for teaching language. Tied to standards, the model trains teachers to provide access to core curriculum using local district guidelines and curriculum. For more information, see <http://www.projectglad.com>
2. Colorín Colorado is a free web-based service that provides information, activities and advice for educators and Spanish-speaking families of English language learners (ELLs). Colorín Colorado is an educational initiative of WETA, the flagship public television and radio station in the nation's capital. Major funding comes from the American Federation of Teachers, with additional support from the National Institute for Literacy and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. For more information, see <http://www.colorincolorado.org>

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After Viewing Questions Answered

1. *Is Moises good at math? How do you know?*
Yes. In the first scene he is doing his math homework and he is enjoying it. He is also the only one in the class to get the right answer to the practice problem. And on the real test, he seems to be doing well on the arithmetic problems before he turns the page and sees the word problems.
2. *Why was Moises confused about the blocks?*
He hears the English word “blocks”. He knows that this word can mean building blocks, but he doesn’t know that it can also mean city blocks. So he thinks the boy in the math problem is running with blocks instead of running city blocks.
3. *When did Moises realize he was going to have difficulty with the math test? Why was he going to have difficulty?*
When he sees that the practice test is mostly word problems. He is going to have difficulty because he can hardly read any English.
4. *Why do you think the director chose to show the words in the math problem floating around?*
To show that Moises can’t read English. To him, the words just look like a jumble of letters.
5. *Why do you think the teacher’s voice was distorted when we first hear Moises listening to her? How do you think the filmmakers made her voice sound that way?*
To show that Moises can’t understand spoken English, except for a few words. The filmmakers had the teacher speak normally, then afterwards they cut up the words into syllables and re-arranged the order of them, so that parts of words sounded familiar but it was hard to tell what she was saying.
6. *Why did Moises keep saying “40”?*
He looked up “forty” in his dictionary, so he would know how to say it in English. He knows that it is the right answer. He can’t understand Ms. Peterson’s questions about explaining how he got the answer. He thinks maybe he’s not saying “40” correctly in English.
7. *How did Moises feel after he repeated “40” several times?*
He feels confused and embarrassed.
8. *Why did the teacher try to find Moises a math test in Spanish?*
Because she knows he could do the math problems if he could understand the questions. She thinks that finding him a test in Spanish will at least make him feel better, even if it won’t be accepted officially.
9. *What was interesting about the Principal’s conversation with the janitor and why?*
He speaks to the janitor in Spanish but tells Ms. Peterson that the school needs to speak to the students in English.
10. *Why couldn’t Moises take the test in Spanish?*
At the time of writing, California has 1.6 million English Learner children. No Child Left Behind imposes a mandatory duty on states to ensure that its academic testing of English Learners is “valid and reliable”, and where practicable “in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know”. But the State of California has official tests in English only. At least 9 states - New York, Texas, Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon and Pennsylvania - do offer tests in other languages.
11. *Why did Moises stop playing kickball?*
The rules had been changed to “no tagging” today, so Moises is called “out” even though he tagged up. Moises didn’t understand because he doesn’t speak English.
12. *What was significant about Enrique throwing trash on the ground in front of Moises’ brother Luis?*
Discrimination exists between Latinos that can and cannot speak English.
13. *What happened in the flashback that Moises has when he was in the bathroom considering skipping the math test? What do you think the purpose was of the flashback?*
Moises and his mother are crossing the border from Mexico to California. It is an indication that he/his family traveled very far and sacrificed a lot to have the opportunity to live in the US and go to school. Moises chooses to go to class even though he won’t understand the questions, partly because he and his mother have worked so hard to get here.
14. *Where was the fence scene supposed to be? How do you think the filmmakers filmed the fence scene?*

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The scene is supposed to be at or near the border with Mexico. Because the film had a low budget, the scene had to be filmed closer to San Francisco, where the filmmakers lived. They found a landfill in Livermore, which had a fence, and they added barbed wire to the top.

15. *Why did Moises choose to do the math test? What would you have done?*

Many answers here! Because he and his mother have sacrificed so much to be in the US and getting an education here. Because he does not want to disappoint his family. Because he realizes that it is the right thing to do.

16. *Do you think Moises will do well on the test? Why or why not? If not, do you think it means that he is not good at math?*

Probably not (this particular test anyway), because the test is mostly word problems that he doesn't understand. But he is good at math and would do well if it was in Spanish, so the test result doesn't reflect how good at math he is.

17. *Was Ms. Peterson a good teacher? Why or why not?*

Some people say yes, because she keeps trying to help Moises. Others say no, because she lacks many of the strategies for teaching English Language Learner students.

18. *What could have made her a better teacher? Why didn't she do these things?*

There are many resources available to help teachers become better at teaching English Language Learners, but they take time and money to implement, and it is very hard for individual teachers to proactively seek these programs out, when they are already overwhelmed by their work. An example program is <http://www.projectglad.com/>. There is also information at <http://www.colorincolorado.org>.

19. *Why do you think the filmmakers made this film?*

To try to raise awareness of what it is like when you don't understand what your teacher is saying. We wanted to really draw the audience in, which is why we made a fiction film rather than a documentary – in fiction it is a little easier to draw the audience in to the perspective of the main character.