

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Addressing Anti-Immigrant Bias with *Welcome to the New World*

Lesson Plan and Overview

Books Matter: *Welcome to the New World*

This graphic novel tells the story of the Aldabaan family. After escaping a Syrian prison, Ibrahim Aldabaan and his family fled the country to seek protection in the U.S. Resettled in Connecticut with little English, few friends, and even less money, the family of seven strive to create something like home. As a blur of language classes, job-training programs, and the fearsome first days of high school give way to normalcy, the Aldabaans are lulled into a sense of security. A white van cruising slowly past the house prompts some unease, which erupts into full terror when the family receives a death threat and is forced to flee and start all over yet again. The U.S. in which the Aldabaans must make their way is by turns kind and ignorant, generous and cruel, uplifting and heartbreaking.

Students will use the story of the Aldabaan family as told in the graphic series and novel *Welcome to the New World* to deepen their understanding of the refugee experience and dispel stereotypes about people seeking asylum. Learning more about the refugee experience compels students and adults alike to address anti-immigrant bias in their communities and build a more inclusive climate.

Grade Level

Grades 6–8

Learning Objectives

- Students will build knowledge of the refugee experience.
- Students will identify manifestations of anti-immigrant bias through the events of *Welcome to the New World* and build their capacity to counter anti-immigrant bias.
- Students will recognize the importance of learning and sharing many stories of migration.

Materials Needed

- [Understanding the Refugee Experience: Welcome to the New World](#) (video)
- [Welcome to the New World](#) book excerpt

- [Welcome to the New World](#) (*The New York Times* Opinion Series)
- [“The Danger of a Single Story”](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (video)

Words You Might Use

Anti-immigrant bias: The marginalization and/or oppression of people who are of immigrant origin, transnational or outside the dominant national identity or culture.

Asylum: A protection given by a nation to someone who has left their home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution,” and it allows them to stay in their new country.

Refugee: A person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country, and cannot obtain protection in that country, due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted in the future “on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

Core Activity

Watch the recording of the webinar [Understanding the Refugee Experience: Welcome to the New World](#) hosted by the Immigrant Learning Center. Or, assign viewing of the webinar to students ahead of time.

Remind students that *Welcome to the New World* is a graphic novel based on *New York Times* graphic story series about a Syrian refugee family. Journalist and author, Jake Halpern, and illustrator, Michael Sloan, created the graphic novel to show the Aldabaan family’s journey fleeing the civil war in Syria as refugees and seeking asylum in the United States in 2016.

Engage students in a discussion to activate their prior knowledge using the following questions:

- What is *Welcome to the New World* about?
- Have you read graphic novels or comics before? How was this story similar or different?
- Who are the Aldabaans? What did they experience?
- Did the story of the Aldabaan family’s journey remind you of any other stories you’ve heard or read?

Next, explain to students that they are going to examine some of the panels of *Welcome to the New World* and consider the role bias played in the family’s experience as newly arrived refugees in the United

States. Ask students to define a refugee. Share or elicit the following definition:

Refugee: A person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country, and cannot obtain protection in that country, due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of being persecuted in the future “on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Let students know that this definition was adopted by Congress into U.S. immigration law in the Refugee Act of 1980.

Ask students to define asylum. Share or elicit the following definition:

Asylum: A protection given by a nation to someone who has left their home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution,” and it allows them to stay in their new country. Remind students that the Aldabaan family are refugees who left Syria and sought asylum in the United States.

Invite students to think or jot down what ideas or images come to mind when they hear the words refugee and asylum. Allow about two minutes of silent reflection time. Tell students to keep their thoughts, words and images to themselves during that time. Next, share or elicit a definition of a stereotype. A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Tell students that in the news, on social media and on TV series or movies, we often see stereotypes of refugees and people seeking asylum. Tell students that since 1980, more than 3 million refugees have resettled in the United States, and there are more than 26 million refugees in the world as of 2020, but often certain ideas of refugees can take root in our minds. Invite students to look back at their notes, without sharing them, and circle any thoughts, words or images that might be based on stereotypes.

Next, share or elicit a definition of anti-immigrant bias. Anti-immigrant bias is the marginalization and/or oppression of people who are of immigrant origin, transnational or outside the dominant national identity or culture. Tell students that they are going to explore the *Welcome to the New World* series and notice examples of anti-immigrant bias that the Aldabaan family experienced.

Display the [book excerpt *Welcome to the New World*](#) by Jake Halpern and Michael Sloan, and read it as a group. Invite students to discuss the beginning of the book. Some questions to use are:

- What happened in the beginning of the graphic novel?
- Who are the members of the Aldabaan family?
- What are the family members feeling? How can you tell?

- What fears do the family members express? What hopes do they express?
- How is this family's experience similar or different to other stories (real or fiction) you've heard about refugees or immigrants?

Next, distribute or display the panels from [The New York Times graphic series *Welcome to the New World*](#). Invite students to review the panels, either by reading them independently or moving around gallery-style to explore each panel.

Reconvene the class and engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:

- What panels or events in the series stood out to you? What happened?
- What thoughts went through your mind as you read and viewed each of the panels?
- What examples of anti-immigrant bias did the Aldabaan family experience? What was the impact of those events?
- What did you learn about the Aldabaan's experience seeking asylum? How was their experience similar or different to other stories or ideas you have about refugees?
- What examples did you see of people supporting the Aldabaan family? What did those actions mean to the family?
- Have you or someone you know ever moved from one place to another? Are there some parts of that experience that are similar to the story of the Aldabaan family? How are those experiences different?
- How did learning about the Aldabaan family change or add to your ideas about what it means to be a refugee or seek asylum?
- Why is it important to share and read or watch many different stories about refugees and immigrants?
- Have you heard of any examples of anti-immigrant bias in our community? What is the impact of those actions?
- What can we do as a class or school to make this community more welcoming to refugees and immigrants? What kind of community would we be if everyone learned more about people who are seeking asylum?

Optional Culmination: Watch the TED Talk video, [“The Danger of a Single Story”](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Discuss why it is important to not have just one story of immigrants and refugees.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Read the entire graphic novel, *Welcome to the New World*, along with The Immigrant Learning Center’s [Welcome to the New World Curriculum and Learning Guide](#) over nine lessons.
- Invite students to design their own short story using graphic panels. Ask students to identify a person they know or a person they’ve read about who moved from one place to another. Have students create an outline of the story, including characters, setting, plot, conflict, and theme. Allow students enough time to plan out their panels, including illustrations and dialogue, to have peer review sessions and conferences, and then create a final product to present to others. Invite students to include an author’s note answering the question: *Why is it important to tell many stories about asylum and migration?*
- Support students in learning about opportunities to support refugees in their own communities. Search for local organizations that support new immigrants and refugees, like the ones that helped Naji’s family. Ask someone from the organization to speak to your students about the work they do and find out how they can support their efforts or take action to make their community more welcoming and inclusive to newcomers.

Home Connection

Share ADL’s Table Talk [Refugees, Reactions and World Response](#) and [What is the ‘Muslim Ban’?](#)

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will engage in discussions about the experience of the Aldabaan family in their first few months of arriving in the United States as refugees. Students will explore stereotypes and anti-immigrant bias within the story, *Welcome to the New World* and beyond. Students will discuss the importance of learning many stories of refugees to combat stereotypes and taking action to make their community more welcoming to people seeking asylum or moving from place to place.

Virtual Variation

Have students watch the [Understanding the Refugee Experience: Welcome to the New World](#) webinar recording on their own or with a family member. After watching, have them respond to the four questions in writing or by making an audio recording of their responses. Engage students in the discussion of key vocabulary terms and examining the excerpt of *Welcome to the New World* together in a live session. For the next part of the activity, assign students to read *The New York Times* graphic series on their own and write or record their responses to the discussion question.