

THE “PUBLIC CHARGE” LESSON PLAN

Skill Focus: Writing an Argument

Grades: 6-12

Time: 60-90 minutes

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Should immigrants who may be more likely to need government assistance be allowed to stay in the U.S. and become permanent residents?

OVERVIEW

In the following lesson, students explore the Department of Homeland Security’s proposed change to policies that determine who can become permanent resident (receive a “Green Card”) based on their likelihood to need public government assistance (the so-called “Public Charge Rule”). Through reading real-life case studies and analyzing data on public aid programs, students develop an understanding of the policy and its potential effects on people in the United States. Applying their knowledge, students write arguments based on evidence to submit to the federal government as public comment on the proposal. Through this lesson, students develop their argumentative writing skills while taking a stand on a current policy issue, taking action to influence their government and the people living in their communities.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Interpret stories, quotes, and graphs in order to collect evidence to support an argument
- Use evidence, such as anecdotes and statistics, to support an argument about government policy and immigration
- Communicate their positions to the federal government

STANDARDS

Alignment to [Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts](#):

CCSS-ELA-Literacy W9-10.1, CCSS-ELA-Literacy W11-12.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

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Alignment to [National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#):

Strand 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

ASSESSMENT

Students will create an argument, supported with evidence, to submit as a real-world public comment to the Department of Homeland Security at <https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=USCIS-2010-0012-0001>. *The public comment period is open from now until December 10, 2018.*

Note: All comments submitted to the federal government will be posted publicly at <https://www.regulations.gov/>, including any personal information included, so teachers should provide clear guidance to students regarding privacy that is in line with their school and district privacy policies. The federal government encourages public comments from anyone who is interested because “public participation is an essential function of good governance.”

MATERIALS

- [Slide deck with lesson flow and prompts](#)
- [Case Studies of Public Aid](#)
 - Optional: [graphic organizer for case studies](#)
- [Fact Sheet: “Public Charge”](#)
 - Optional: [graphic organizer for fact sheet](#)
- [Public Comment Worksheet](#)

* Note: The materials in this lesson summarize the [lengthy document published in the federal register](#).

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Do Now (5-10 min)

Show [slide](#) with photo of Statue of Liberty and this text:



The plaque on the Statue of Liberty in New York reads:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

What do these words, or the Statue of Liberty, mean to you? Do you agree with these ideas?

Have students write quietly for a few minutes. Ask a few students to share their ideas.

* Note: These lines on the Statue of Liberty's plaque are from a poem called "The New Colossus" written by Emma Lazarus in 1883.

*Adaptations
for English
Learners*

Consider reducing the poem to just the first two lines. Have students identify words they do not understand, and create a class list of definitions for these words (such as huddled, masses, yearning, wretched, refuse, teeming, tempest-tost).

2. Framing/Background (5 min)

Explain to students that the United States has been considered a “nation of immigrants” for a long time. The Statue of Liberty was built in 1886 with those words about welcoming immigrants, including poor people seeking refuge. However, around the same time, in 1882, the U.S. government said that immigration was not allowed by “any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge,” meaning poor people and others who may need government support. This debate about whether the U.S. really should be a nation of immigrants has been going on for a long time.

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The Trump Administration is proposing to make it more difficult for immigrants who may be more likely to need government assistance to stay in the U.S. and become permanent residents. Today, we will explore this proposed change, and each of you will get to decide what you think about it and then give real feedback to the U.S. government about the proposed change. There is no right or wrong answer. We live in a democracy, and each of you gets to speak up and say what you think about this important question. Let’s remember to treat one another with respect during today’s lesson, especially when we disagree.

3. Case-Studies (15-20 min)

Distribute the [three case studies](#) (Leana Wen, Lucas Benitez, Jan Koum). Tell students that we will be starting by reading real stories of real people who would have been impacted by this proposed change in the definition of “public charge.” Ask students to read the case studies (either silently or aloud). As they read the case studies, ask students to focus on the following questions:

- What did these people have in common?
- Do you think these people should have been allowed to immigrate to the United States? Why or why not?

After reading, have students discuss the questions in groups, then debrief as a class.

Optional: [graphic organizer](#) for reading the case studies

<i>Adaptations for English Learners</i>	Consider using a Jigsaw reading, where students are divided into three groups, each group reads on case study and fills in part of a graphic organizer , and then students meet with students from other groups to learn about the other two people and fill in the rest of the graphic organizer.
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4. Fact Sheet: “Public Charge” (20-25 min)

Distribute the [Public Charge Fact Sheet](#), which includes a summary of the proposed rule change, some pro and con arguments, and additional data on how many people receive government benefits. (There is also a [slide](#) which summarizes the current “public charge” rule and the proposed changes.)

Ask students to read individually and respond to these questions:

- What questions do you have about the Trump Administration’s proposed changes to the “public charge” rule?
- What is one piece of evidence supporting the Trump Administration’s proposal?
- What is one piece of evidence opposing the Trump Administration’s proposal?

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- What is your opinion? Do you support or oppose the Trump Administration’s proposal? Who belongs in the United States?

Optional: This [graphic organizer](#) may help students process the information in the fact sheet, before they discuss it with peers.

Have students discuss their responses in a group, then call on students to share out to the class.

NOTE: It is possible that students may make arguments based on inaccurate and misleading information they may have heard from political leaders or the media. If this happens, it is important to correct the misinformation and challenge any racist assumptions, while also validating each student’s right to form their own opinion.

<i>Adaptations for English Learners</i>	Have students use the graphic organizer , either individually or in pairs, as they read the the fact sheet. Then have students talk in small groups before moving to the discussion questions above.
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5. Writing Public Comment (15-20 min)

Explain that they are now ready to take a stand: *What do you think of the Trump Administration’s proposal to change the meaning of the words “public charge” so that it will be more difficult for many immigrants to stay in the U.S. and become permanent residents?*

Have students craft an argument, using evidence, to agree or disagree with the government’s proposed policy change. Distribute the [Public Comment Worksheet](#) (optional, based on students’ needs) to use as a graphic organizer to help students link their claim and evidence.

Have students type their final comments into the government website: <https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=USCIS-2010-0012-0001>. (There is also a slide which shows how to submit comments.) ****The public comment period is open until December 10, 2018.**

Note: Public comments may also be submitted by U.S. mail to the following address:

Samantha Deshommes, Chief, Regulatory Coordination Division
Office of Policy and Strategy, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20529-2140.

To ensure proper handling, please reference DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012 in your correspondence. Mail must be postmarked by the comment submission deadline of December 10, 2018.

EXTENSIONS

Current Impact: The new definition of “public charge” is already being applied to people entering the U.S., even on tourist visas. Students could read the story of Michelle Nicoll Gutierrez, who was denied entry to the country when coming to visit her mother, a U.S. citizen. Even though she lives in Mexico and is not planning to move to the U.S., Customs and Border Protection officials claimed that she was likely to be a public charge because she once legally received U.S. government health care benefits when she was pregnant with her son. This story was first reported by [The Houston Chronicle in August 2018](#). For Spanish speaking students, [here is a link to a news report](#) about another case of a family that has already been impacted by the new “public charge” rules.

Examples of Activism: Students who are frustrated that the U.S. government is implementing such sweeping changes to immigration law using a bureaucratic rule-making process may want to learn more about grassroots efforts to stop the new rule from taking effect. [Protecting Immigrant Families](#) is a good place to start.

Socratic Seminar: Time permitting, teachers could include a Socratic Seminar after the Fact Sheet activity and before the Writing Public Comment activity. Guiding/Springboard questions and norms could be created. This would give students more opportunity to process and discuss the information before taking a stand.

Immigration Past & Present: Explore the connections between the current-day debate over immigration with past immigration debates in the U.S., using [these political cartoons](#).



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This lesson was developed by **Matt Alexander**, who has over twenty years of experience as a teacher and administrator in the San Francisco public schools. In the early 2000s, he helped lead the community organizing effort that resulted in the founding of June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE) and served as JJSE’s principal for a decade. Matt also serves on the Leadership Council of Immigrants Rising.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT IMMIGRANTS RISING

Founded in 2006, **Immigrants Rising** transforms individuals and fuels broader changes. With resources and support, undocumented young people are able to get an education, pursue careers, and build a brighter future for themselves and their community. For more information, visit us online at www.immigrantsrising.org.