

Lesson Plans for NYC Department of Education's Hidden Voices Curriculum: MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

Each lesson can be taught on its own or as part of the unit.

[English for Assimilation](#)

[English as Survival](#)

[English for Expansion](#)

[English as an Asset](#)

[English as a Second Language](#)

[English as Access](#)

4.6.6 - English as Survival

The Asian American Education Project

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Grade Levels	7-10
Lesson Overview	After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, approximately 1.1 million Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian refugees arrived in the United States over the next three decades. As refugees arrived, their assimilation and education in the United States, especially their ability to learn and speak English, became a prominent issue. In this two-day lesson, students will learn about the waves of Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and how limited English-proficiency affected their adjustment to living in the United States. On Day 1, students will read a text and analyze a video to understand the resettlement experiences of Southeast Asian refugees. On Day 2, students will analyze primary and secondary sources to further their understanding of the educational experiences of Vietnamese refugees.
Focus Question	What was the English learning experience of Southeast Asian refugees during resettlement in the United States?
Lesson Objectives	Students will compare secondary and primary sources in order to assess the ways in which Southeast Asian refugees were educated during resettlement.

Investing in Refugee English Learners Essay

Background:

In 1965, the United States officially entered the Vietnam War with the goal of preventing the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Communism is a type of government that believes in publicly-owned goods. It is in direct opposition to American ideals of democracy and capitalism. The Vietnam War (1955-1975) ended with the Fall of Saigon in 1975 when the communist North Vietnamese armies took over the south.

The war resulted in mass displacement, death, and destruction in not just Vietnam, but neighboring countries such as Laos and Cambodia.

Essay:

Because of its involvement in the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the United States had a responsibility to assist in the post-war efforts. As such, approximately 1.1 million Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian **refugees** arrived in the United States over the next three decades. As refugees arrived, their **assimilation** and education in the United States, especially their ability to learn and speak English, became a prominent issue.

Southeast Asian refugees came to the United States in many waves starting in 1975 and ending in 2005. Vietnamese **elites** – such as those who worked in government and the military — arrived first. They were known as the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees. They tended to be highly educated.

After this first wave, the United States passed laws to allow for more refugees to enter the country. Refugees from all backgrounds within Vietnam, and then from Cambodia and Laos, were able to immigrate. This resulted in the second wave of Southeast Asian refugees. These refugees were from more **rural** areas and had less opportunities to be educated. Part of this second wave included Vietnamese boat people. These refugees were forced to flee Vietnam in small cramped boats. They faced many dangers and many perished at sea.

The United States did not have a refugee **resettlement** program in place before many of the Southeast Asian refugees arrived, so they relied on **sponsors** in the form of churches, American families, former refugees, and businesses to help with resettlement. Refugees were sent to live under these sponsorships and were spread out across the country. This encouraged rapid assimilation. It also helped prevent any one community or state from being financially burdened by a big influx of refugees.

In practice, spreading out the refugees added to the disconnection, isolation, and **trauma** that many refugees experienced during resettlement. Large groups of refugees moved again to places with big concentrations of refugee populations and/or based on connections they made with others in the refugee camps.

The first wave of refugees had an easier time adjusting to living in the United States than the later waves. The main reason for this was that most of the first wave refugees knew how to speak English. They had been educated and had worked with U.S. officials during the war. They had skills that were considered useful in the United States. The refugees who arrived in later waves had limited English and professional skills. They required more support in adjusting to life in the United States.

The United States was not prepared for the task of teaching refugee students. The refugees' first instruction was done in the U.S. refugee camps. For example, in 1975 at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, the 13,325 Vietnamese in the refugee camp were taught "**Survival English.**" This was a common practice. The refugees learned just enough English to answer some basic questions and get by.

Children couldn't leave these base-turned-camps to attend the public schools nearby. And so children and parents were taught at the same time. The refugees were also encouraged to watch tape-recorded English lessons, television programs, and commercials to learn English. As families were resettled in various cities, their children started to attend local public schools.

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 meant that some schools were able to create bilingual education programs for their refugee students through funding received from the federal government. For example, in Chicago Public Schools in the 1980s, there were over 150 schools with bilingual programs, and Vietnamese

was among the top five languages being taught at the time. (Southeast Asian refugees were the first large immigrant population to benefit from bilingual programs in the United States.)

But overall, bilingual education was still a new concept at this time in the United States. As such, bilingual teaching materials and resources were very scarce for the new Southeast Asian refugee students who had little to no English **proficiency**. In addition, the second wave of refugees also had limited proficiency in their own native languages. This meant that they struggled with transferring reading and writing skills from one language to another. In addition, Southeast Asian refugee students were often in classrooms where the teacher did not speak the same language as them and the class was taught all in English.

However, this was not the experience of all refugees learning to speak English in the United States. When refugees from Cuba arrived in the United States in growing numbers after 1959, they faced the same challenge of needing to learn English. As a result, the first publicly-funded bilingual education program emerged in 1963 in Florida at Coral Way Elementary. Like Fort Chaffee, the district didn't have Spanish materials or teachers trained in second-language techniques. However, they received funding to create a **pilot** bilingual school that opened in less than a year. To find bilingual teachers, the district recruited and sent sixty Cuban refugees to be trained as teachers at the University of Miami. By the end of the first year, Cuban refugee children learned English well enough to communicate effectively, and performed as well as students in regular schools within five years.

Programs like the bilingual education program in Florida recognized the value of speaking multiple languages. This was a significant step away from English-only sentiments that treated the speaking of another language as disloyal or useless. Yet, despite the success of the bilingual program at Coral Way Elementary, bilingual education programs were not similarly invested in for Southeast Asian refugees. And so, only those students who were able to acquire proficient English skills were able to succeed.

English skills impacted job opportunities. Those with limited English skills could only obtain low-wage jobs. In addition, many Southeast Asian refugees faced racism as a result of anti-immigrant sentiments. Like with other Asian groups, Southeast Asian refugees were subject to the “Perpetual Foreigner” **stereotype** which positioned them as “outsiders” and “foreigners.” As refugees, these new immigrants faced post-war trauma, language barriers, culture shock, and discrimination. Some Southeast Asian American youth turned to gangs for support.

Southeast Asian refugees were also affected by the “Model Minority” stereotype. This stereotype painted all Asian Americans as achieving with little support when it came to education and employment. Over-reporting in news stories of the high achievement of some Vietnamese students also added to this assumption that all Asian Americans were doing well and didn't require any additional support or help. Yet this wasn't true for many of the refugees who were displaced and deeply traumatized by war. The Model Minority stereotype is dangerous because it serves as a **racial wedge** and also hides issues faced by different subgroups by painting the entire community as highly successful. It also prevents groups, like Southeast Asian refugees, from getting the assistance programs and funding they need. This lack of investment and support impacts Southeast Asian communities to this day, as they continue to have lower educational attainment, employment, English-language proficiency, and health access rates than both the general population and other Asian Americans.

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Vocabulary:¹

- **Assimilation:** the process of becoming similar to others by learning their culture and language
- **Elites:** a society's upper classes
- **Pilot:** a program done as an experiment or test before being introduced more widely
- **Proficiency:** a high degree of competence or skill
- **Racial Wedge:** the process of splitting up communities of color or pitting communities of color against each other
- **Refugees:** people who are forced to flee their home to escape danger or persecution
- **Resettlement:** the process of settling people when they are moved to a new place to live
- **Rural:** related to countryside or farms; outside of the city
- **Sponsor:** a group or people who help refugees find a place to live, get a job, etc.
- **Stereotype:** a widely held but incomplete or oversimplified or inaccurate idea of a particular type of person or group
- **Survival English:** English terms and words necessary to live and work in an English speaking environment
- **Trauma:** emotional response to a very significant or intense event that resulted in severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury

¹ Definition adapted from Merriam-Webster

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about the Vietnam War and the Southeast Asian refugees?
2. What are the different waves of Southeast Asian refugees? Why is this important to know that there were differences between the two major waves?
3. What was the U.S. resettlement program like? What was the rationale for and the effects of spreading the refugees across the country?
4. What is the significant role English played in the lives of the Southeast Asian refugees?
5. How was English taught to the Southeast Asian refugees?
6. What was the impact of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968?
7. How were Cuban refugees and Southeast Asian refugees treated differently in regard to the teaching of English?
8. What challenges did the Southeast Asian refugees face and continue to face?

DAY ONE

Activity 1: Introduction to the Lesson

- A. Share the following quote about Alison Wong who grew up in New York City's Chinatown in the 1970s ("The Wong Family Story": https://www.tenement.org/lesson_plans/the-wong-family-story/):
"Alison remembered that English was not only the language of instruction, but the common language shared by the Puerto Rican, Dominican and Chinese students."
- B. Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
1. What are some benefits of having a common language, like English, for diverse groups?
 2. What are some of the benefits of being bilingual (knowing a different language, like one that is spoken at home with family)?
- C. **If you are teaching this lesson as part of the [Multilingual Education unit](#):** Tell students that the previous lessons have talked about the experiences of Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Tell them that today's lesson will focus on another Asian American group: Southeast Asian Americans.
1. Explain that Southeast Asian Americans are descended from the mainland Southeast Asian region which consists of Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, etc. Show students these countries on a map.
 2. Explain that many non-U.S.-born Southeast Asian Americans came over as refugees.
- D. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** If needed, define refugees as people who have been forced to leave their countries in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disasters.

Activity 2: Discussing "Survival English"

- A. Have students read the text entitled, "[Investing in Refugee English Learners](#)."
- B. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** The article addresses the Vietnam War in addition to the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority stereotypes. If students need more grounding, consider teaching the following lesson plans from The Asian American Education Project:
1. "Southeast Asian Refugees": <https://asianamericanedu.org/southeast-asian-refugees.html>
 2. "Asian Americans Serving and Fighting in the Vietnam War":
<https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-americans-serving-and-fighting-in-vietnam-war.html>
 3. "Asian American Veterans and the Anti-War Movement":
<https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-american-veterans-and-anti-war-movement.html>
 4. "Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans":
<https://asianamericanedu.org/perpetualforeigner.html>
 5. "Model Minority Myth":
<https://asianamericanedu.org/3.1-Model-Minority-Myth-lesson-plan.html>
- C. Have students complete a Quickwrite identifying what they think is the most significant idea from the text. Have students justify their reasons for thinking so by using evidence from the text.

Strategy: Quickwrite

A Quickwrite is an instructional practice that allows students an opportunity to quickly respond to a question or prompt. It is often timed for 3-10 minutes. It provides teachers an assessment of what students know or think at that moment in time. It provides students an opportunity to freely write down

their first thoughts. It can be used at any time in a lesson.

For more on Quickwrites, see: <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/literacy-glossary>

D. Facilitate a discussion by asking the Discussion Questions.

E. Have students work in small groups to discuss “Survival English”:

1. Have students define it based on the text.
2. Have students write a list of examples of “Survival English.”
3. Ask students the following questions:
 - a. Is this English enough to succeed (not just survive) in the United States? Why or why not?
 - b. What is the role of public education in going beyond “Survival English”?
 - c. **If you are teaching this lesson as part of the [Multilingual Education unit](#):** What impact do the laws, policies, and practices that we have discussed in this unit play in going beyond “Survival English” for immigrants and newcomers?

F. NOTE TO TEACHER: Examples of “Survival English” include (but are not limited to): ordering a meal, asking for directions, using the bathroom, asking for help, etc.

Activity 3: Film Study of “Southeast Asian Refugees”

A. Distribute the worksheet entitled, “[Film/Video Study Analysis](#).” Review questions on the worksheet so students know what to look for.

B. Show this video entitled, “Southeast Asian Refugees”:
https://vimeo.com/687752379?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=168628486. Tell students not to take notes so that they can focus on the video’s content.

C. Allow students time to complete the worksheet.

D. Show the video again. Encourage students to take notes this time.

E. Review responses with students by asking the following questions:

1. What is the title and why is it titled as such?
2. What is the year of release and why does that matter?
3. Who created this and why?
4. Who did you identify as a significant person and why?
5. What did you identify as a significant fact and why?
6. What and how was your thinking changed?
7. What were you not convinced by?
8. What techniques did the video/film use to convince viewers of its message?

F. NOTE TO TEACHER: Answers will vary especially in regard to significance. But make sure students understand the following points:

1. The video clip is part of the PBS docu-series entitled “Asian Americans.” It was released in 2020 during escalating anti-Asian hate spurred on by negative rhetoric blaming Asians for COVID-19.
2. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), as the creator, is significant because it ensures a wide national audience. PBS is also known for its credibility and reliability.

3. As a documentary, it features interviews with people and shows images of primary sources. This lends credibility and creates empathy.

Strategy: Film/Video Study Worksheets

Having to respond to prompts assures that students will pay attention to the film/video. In addition, prompts guide students to think about the premise, theme, structure, form, craft, etc. Furthermore, such practices treat videos and films like texts; as such, students realize that they can apply critical thinking skills to all types of texts (not just written texts).

For more on Film Study strategies, see:

<https://teachwithmovies.org/film-study-worksheets-for-documentaries/>

Activity 4: Reviewing Quickwrites

- A. Have students revisit their Quickwrite responses.
 1. Ask students: After this lesson, do you still think what you selected is the most significant idea? How so? If not, how would you change it? And, what influenced your change?
 2. **If you are teaching this lesson as part of the [Multilingual Education unit](#):** Remind students to think about the previous lesson in which they assessed significance.
- B. Allow students the opportunity to share their Quickwrite responses to a partner.

DAY TWO

Activity 1: Primary and Secondary Sources

- A. Review previous learning by asking the following questions:
 1. What is the difference between primary sources and secondary sources?
 2. Why do historians need both types of sources?
- B. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** As a reminder, primary sources are firsthand accounts, and secondary sources are secondhand accounts or information created from primary sources. Primary sources are credible as evidence but they can be unreliable as people have different experiences, opinions, and memories. They can also be hard to comprehend as they are subject to people's literacy skills and the resources available to them at the time. Secondary sources show how primary sources relate to existing knowledge and offer explanations or interpretations that can help foster further understanding. They also take a broader view and may look at patterns and consistencies across various primary sources. However, they can be unreliable as well because they are subject to the creator's perspectives, interpretations, and biases.
- C. Ask students: Why is it important to consider primary sources from people of color?
- D. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** The voices and perspectives of people of color are often excluded in mainstream narratives. They have been denied various opportunities, including education which impact their literacy skills. In addition, they have been denied access to public spaces which is evident by the lack of appropriate representation in media, literature, politics, etc.

Activity 2: Analyzing a Secondary Source on Vietnamese Refugee Children

- A. Tell students that they will be studying a secondary source followed by primary sources.
- B. Have students read the secondary source entitled, “[U.S. Schools Baffle Vietnamese Refugee Children](#)” and distribute the worksheet entitled, “[Secondary Source Analysis](#).”
- C. NOTE TO TEACHER: You can read the article as a whole class and annotate together or you can have students read and annotate on their own. If pressed for time, assign the reading as homework.**
- D. Work with students to complete the worksheet entitled, “[Secondary Source Analysis](#).”
1. Record the title, author, date, and source of the text in the top box.
 2. Record observations in the left column.
 3. Record questions in the right column.
 4. Annotate as you read by highlighting or underlining important ideas and circling confusing vocabulary and concepts.
 5. Complete the reflection questions at the end of the worksheet.

Strategy: Analyzing Sources (Observe, Reflect, Question Strategy)

Primary and secondary sources can be complex texts. But, they are necessary for historical thinking. Both sources complement each other in order to help learners build convincing arguments. Teachers can help students by providing prompting questions as they read.

For more on analyzing sources, see:

- https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/documents/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf
- <https://www.wetechnc.org/resources/resource/grade-10-historical-thinking-tools-and-analysis-strategies/> (p. 55)

- E. Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
1. How did the article confirm what you already know?
 2. What new facts or ideas did you learn from the article?
 3. What comparisons does the author make between the Vietnamese refugees and the American students?
 4. What challenges did the Vietnamese refugees face? What details does the author share to convey these challenges?
 5. How does money come into play in regard to the education of Vietnamese refugees? What are the controversies? (What is the federal government’s responsibility in regard to serving the refugees?)
 6. How were the Vietnamese refugees being taught English?
 7. What are the challenges of teaching the Vietnamese refugees English?
 8. What are the differences between the Vietnamese refugees and previous groups of immigrants before them?
 9. What does the article say about the risk of cultural and language erasure?

Activity 3: Corroborating Primary and Secondary Sources on Vietnamese Refugee Experience

NOTE TO TEACHER: If pressed for time, have students read the primary sources and complete the worksheet entitled “[Corroboration Tool](#)” for homework.

- A. Distribute the worksheet entitled, “[Corroboration Tool](#).”
- B. Complete Step 1 with students. Have students think about questions they would like to have answered. Share the following statements: “One of the reasons why we read is to find out information. You are going to read primary sources about the Vietnamese American refugee experience. What would you like to learn?”
- C. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** Encourage students to generate their own questions. But, if they need guidance, provide the following questions as examples: What was the refugee experience like for Vietnamese Americans? What are the challenges of learning English for the Vietnamese refugees? What role did public education play in the lives of Vietnamese refugees? Was the education of Vietnamese refugees effective?
- D. Complete Step 2 with students. Have students hypothesize or answer their question based on what they have already learned.
- E. Complete the first part of Step 3 with students.
 - 1. Review the article entitled, “[U.S. Schools Baffle Vietnamese Refugee Children](#).”
 - 2. Identify the claim and record in the left column.
 - 3. Identify the evidence that supports the claim and record in the left column.
- F. Explain that interviews are primary sources.
- G. Assign students to read at least two of these primary sources - encourage them to annotate as they read:
 - 1. [Interview with Thuy Hoang](#)
 - 2. [Interview with Thien Duong](#)
 - 3. [Interview with Hoa Nguyen](#)
 - 4. [Interview with Xuan Tran](#)
 - 5. [Interview with Tuan Vuong](#)
 - 6. [Interview with Hang Dang](#)
 - 7. [Interview with Anh Ly](#)
 - 8. [Interview with Thien Doan](#)
 - 9. [Interview with Thanh Luu](#)
 - 10. [Interview with Phuong Cao](#)
- H. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** Assign the interviews so that all of them will be read. It’s important to capture the many different voices of the Vietnamese refugees. Note that the interviews were taken from a Master’s Thesis written by Joseph Hieu. Tell students that the interviews were excerpted to focus on the refugee and schooling experiences. For time, some content may have been deleted and is marked with a note: “[deleted content].” Also, please note that the interviews describe traumatic experiences. Graphic content has been deleted but can be inferred.

I. Tell students that it's important to corroborate sources so that we can make reliable and accurate conclusions.

J. Have students complete the remaining questions in Step 3 and Step 4.

1. Identify elements of corroboration between the sources (On what point or facts do the texts agree?)
2. Identify elements of contradiction between the sources. (On what points or facts do the texts disagree?)
3. Which document is more reliable? How so?
4. What further research is necessary to answer the question more accurately? What questions do you have?
5. Reconsider your hypothesis. What has stayed the same? What has changed?
6. What is your new claim?

Strategy: Corroboration Tool

Corroboration is the ability to compare multiple pieces of information or sources in order to identify similarities and/or patterns. Finding corroboration between sources strengthens conclusions, especially when making historical arguments.

For more on the Corroboration Tool, see:

<https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/grade-10-historical-thinking-tools-and-analysis-strategies/> (p. 69-71)

Activity 4: Reviewing the Unit

A. Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:

1. Why is it important to read and analyze multiple sources?
2. What more did you learn from reading the interviews? How did hearing the voices of the refugees enhance your understanding? How did the background information impact your reading of the interview responses?
3. Do you think the Southeast Asian refugees were properly served by the U.S. government during resettlement? Why or why not?

B. **If you are teaching this lesson as part of the [Multilingual Education unit](#):** Summarize this set of lessons by sharing this statement: “So far, the lessons in this unit have been about learning English. The next lesson will be about learning Asian heritage languages.”

Further Information

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Southeast Asian Refugees”:

<https://asianamericanedu.org/southeast-asian-refugees.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Asian Americans Serving and Fighting in the Vietnam War” : <https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-americans-serving-and-fighting-in-vietnam-war.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Asian American Veterans and the Anti-War Movement” : <https://asianamericanedu.org/asian-american-veterans-and-anti-war-movement.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans” : <https://asianamericanedu.org/perpetualforeigner.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Model Minority Myth”:

<https://asianamericanedu.org/3.1-Model-Minority-Myth-lesson-plan.html>