

**Implementation Plan  
NEH Summer Institute:  
California Immigration through Literature and Theatre**

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English III**

**Unit Plan: The American Dream and *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir***

**Notes:**

This unit is intended to augment and expand upon students' summer reading of Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir*. The novel describes the difficulties Grande and her siblings faced growing up without their parents, who immigrated to the United States when Reyna was two. After immigrating to the U.S. herself eight years later, Reyna and her siblings continued to encounter challenges as undocumented citizens. Despite these difficulties, Grande graduated from college, earned a master's degree and has become a successful Latina writer.

The overarching theme of the year for this class is: What is the American Dream and how have different authors responded to it? Is it reality or fantasy?

This unit plan uses reading, reflection, research, interviews, essay writing, and adaptation strategies for performance to explore the topics of the American Dream, immigration, and the separation caused by immigration.

**Integration of Ping Chong and Company's Warm Up Activities**

The class begins most days with warm ups such as those used by Sara Zatz during the NEH Summer Institute.

For example:

After the initial assignment for "What is the American Dream," students play a "Snaps game" warm up activity where they offer one word that they would use to characterize the American Dream; they respond in a circle.

**Procedure:**

**What is the American Dream?**

1. How have these people of influence and power described their definition of the American Dream? Forbes.com

[http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/20/american-dream-oped-cx\\_de\\_dream0307\\_0322dream\\_land.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/20/american-dream-oped-cx_de_dream0307_0322dream_land.html)

In writing, students report on the short interviews that are contained on the forbes website. They summarize these disparate views into a paragraph.

3. Students construct *their* notion of the American Dream in a paragraph. They also write what steps they will take to obtain it.

### ***The Distance Between Us: A Memoir***

#### **1. Adaptation Strategies for Live Performance:**

Students review and explore the novel by developing scripts and performing small pivotal scenes from the book.

- a. Students are shown two adaptation strategies using narrators (refer to Matthew Spangler’s handout “Adaptation Strategies for Using Live Performance to Explore Fiction”).
- b. They are given an example of what a script might look like using a narrator outside the story itself, and one script using Reyna Grande as the narrator.
- c. They then get into groups where they choose a scene they would like to adapt; they then develop a script, and perform the scene for their peers.

#### **2. During the unit, students write reflections on topics from the novel:**

- a. What do you think Reyna Grande’s idea of the American Dream might be? What was her father’s, her sister’s, or her mother’s? Do they fulfill their dreams? What holds them back? Choose one person to write about and integrate at least one quote from the novel.
- b. Before she leaves, Mami asks Mago if she would “...take care of your *hermanos* for me, be their little mother?”  
In what ways does Mago take on the role of their mother? Find three specific ways in which Mago supports Reyna and Carlos both physically and emotionally. Do her efforts succeed? Explain and use quotations to support your statements.
- c. Despite their difficult relationship, Reyna wants to please her father, especially as a teenager living in the United States. Why is this so important to her? How does this help her succeed? What challenges does she face because of her desire to please him? Explain and use quotations to support your statements.
- d. Reyna Grande’s novel *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* describes and alludes to different kinds of “distance.” Examine three different kinds of “distance” and explain how they affect her family.  
Use quotations to support your statements.

**3. Essay Writing** – Students take one of the reflection topics, above, and expand it into a five-paragraph essay in which they develop a clear point of view and support their position with evidence.

#### 4. Research - Understanding Immigration Today

a. Students use Ted Talks to explore the subject of immigration by viewing the talks in groups (with headphones on their iPads) and then reporting back to the class about what they heard. They tell the class why they think the person giving the talk is someone they should listen to, they summarize the speaker's point of view and they let the class know if they agree or disagree with them.

##### **Possible talks include:**

Perceptions are Reality. Or Are They? An Immigrant's Journey: Ekaterina Walter at TEDxPeachtree - Published Nov 21, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhoRGJl-s8M>

Actions are Illegal, Never People: Jose Antonio Vargas at TEDxMidAtlantic - Published Dec 10, 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmz9cCF0KNE>

Some thoughts on immigration | Jan Ting  
TEDxWilmington - Published Sep 10, 2014

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm9jQCdc8\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm9jQCdc8_k)

The Danger of a Single Story | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie | TED Talks - Published Oct 7, 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

Immigration Reform: A Chance For a Better America: Andrea Guerrero at TEDxNashville - Published on May 15, 2013

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvciFjn2v98>

b. To prepare them for the culminating project, students view Ted Talk: Changing the conversation on immigration: Janet Jarman at TEDxSanMigueldeAllende - December 7, 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDHO7qRIXdk>

“Janet Jarman discusses her 16-year photojournalism project on Mexican immigration in the US, where she followed the life of one immigrant girl, Marisol. She calls for changing the conversation on immigration from an impersonal contentious debate to one focused on real human stories.”

Have students reflect on this video: In two to three sentences, summarize Janet Jarman's long-term project that she describes in this talk. What makes her views credible? What comments does she make about journalism today? How does the medium of photography help us understand difficult issues?

## **5. Culminating Project – Photojournalistic Profile**

- a. Students interview a relative or family friend (an adult) that has or who has *had* an American Dream. (This may or may not include someone who immigrated to the United States.)
- b. Create a photojournalistic profile of their life –as it relates to their version of the American Dream.
- c. As a class, students collaborate and agree on what questions to ask interviewees. The class also discusses proper etiquette when interviewing others.
- d. The photos can be taken from the interviewee’s collections but should also include at least three original photos that the student takes.
- e. The photos are to be sequenced in a way that tells a story and are to be captioned with a short paragraph for each image that explains the photo’s relationship to the American Dream.