



Coming to America: The Story of Immigration
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Coming to America is a narrative nonfiction picture book presented in linear chronological order. The forty page book traces the history of the populating of North America exploring the push and pull factors of immigration. Beginning with the ice age “when nomads crossed over a land bridge from Asia,” (p. 3) progressing through European discovery, the slave trade, colonial times, westward expansion and more recent immigration and refugee experiences. The book concludes by celebrating the cultures and contributions of immigrants from farming the land, forming government and building cities and industry. A table of dates and immigration facts comprise the end material.

Coming to America is featured as a read-aloud text in the 2nd grade Listen and Learn strand of the Common Core Immigration curriculum unit (Core Knowledge, 2011), and used as a teacher guided read-aloud in the elementary setting, is a useful resource. In the middle school setting, utilizing this text as a literature circle resource for 7th grade “When Cultures Collide” mini-unit will help build background and connection to the social studies units which the English department supports. Since the theme of immigration is familiar to almost all English language learners, having lived through similar experiences to the scenarios in the text, background and connections are already in place. Students will be able to relate to the unit understanding. Literature circles provide opportunities for heterogeneously grouped students of 4-5 members to read and discuss the same texts, in-depth, for a number of periods and journal write on the text skills practiced (King, 2002).

According to *Scholastic Book Wizard*, the Lexile level of this text is AD890L, guided reading level of O and recommended for grade 3. The Lexile “AD” designation indicates that the book is “adult directed,” written for adults to read aloud to children (Lexile, 2019). The sentences are long and contain fairly high-level vocabulary. When analyzed with *Text Inspector.com*, the

Flesch Reading Ease score is 57.3 (text scale) denoted as fairly difficult to read. The Flesch-Kincaid grade level is 8.8 which is readable by ninth grade students. The average number of words in a sentence is 14.5.

Examining the following sentences, students would need explicit instruction in both brick and mortar vocabulary (Breiseth, 2014) to decipher their message. “They have little money to afford anything except the most basic necessities (p. 14).” “From its beginning, the United States has taken in countless refugees from countries all over the world (p. 33).” The phrase *anything except* and the word *countless* are used for emphasis, but the negative literal definition changes their meanings.

For native speakers and certainly for English language learners, there are several words that would have to be pre-taught to the students. Social Studies academic vocabulary terms are *nomad, colonies, frontiers, regulate, depot, observation, refugees, persecution, melting pot, ethnic*. Other words that students may have heard before but may need redefining are *descendants, settlers, citizens, ordeal, hardy, toiled*.

The Lexile Analyzer chose the following ten words as having “significant consequence or relevance that can be used to help inform instruction”: *contagious, anchor, ethnic, permanent, depot, ordeal, transatlantic, countless, immigration, transcontinental*. The Lexile Indicators for this text rate 5/5 for sentence length complexity with this being a harder text having longer sentences which likely contain clauses that communicate the relationship between ideas. The text scored a 4/5 for word frequency with harder texts having more rare words.

Phonics and phonological decoding of the multi-syllabic words may be difficult for ELL students. Examples of words that do not follow standard rules are: *ocean, fascinating, officials, unique, foreign*. Students would have to be aware of the hard and soft “c” sounds of *recent*,

cities, places, and appreciation. As well as the spelling patterns and pronunciation of words ending in *-gh* and *-ght*.

With regard to morphology issues, the narrative uses the word *hardship* (p.8) in conjunction with the word *trouble*, giving students a clue to its meaning. Later it uses the word *hardy* (p.16) which students may interpret as difficult, the opposite of easy. However, as an adjective it means strong and resilient so this would be a word that is confusing to the reader.

The semantic word choices and synonyms vary greatly throughout the text. When relating immigrants' experiences coming through Ellis Island when passengers had to pass a health screening, the author uses *inspect / inspection, examination, check, observe*. Pages 23-28 also use a sequence of events to describe the process with signal words *first, after, at last, now* but not *first, next, then, finally* as students would traditionally be taught.

The narrative imbues a sense of patriotism and loyalty which citizens develop for their new countries. The refrain of coming to America for a better life is repeated several times throughout the book. The author and illustrator celebrate the diverse origins of the peoples that have populated America throughout history acknowledging their cultural identity. A variety of cultures and the immigrant experience are represented allowing students to see themselves in this mirror and window picture book. Classmates who are not immigrants can gain a new perspective on others' experiences (Flores, 2021).

Overall, this is a highly complex text for English language learners. The sentence length, multisyllabic unknown words, and academic vocabulary are difficult for readers to comprehend without scaffolds and modifications. The illustrations correspond to and enhance the text allowing the reader to gain an understanding but without the visual enhancement, meaning may be lost.

References

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