Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success **Lesson Plan**

Lesson designer: Logan Silva
Topic: Immigration in U.S. History
      U.S. History
      Economics
      Civics

Length: 60 Minutes

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain U.S. immigration patterns in the twentieth and twenty-first century
- Describe different myths about U.S. Immigration patterns
- Write a summary of U.S. immigration myths and reality based on data

<u>Overview:</u>

Immigration patterns to the United States are a controversial and often divisive topic. Using the data from Streets of Gold, students will explore the myths and reality of immigration to the U.S. over the past century. Examining different mythologies about immigration and exploring what the data says is the heart of the lesson, allowing students to take a look at numbers and findings and not rely on gut-instincts or anecdotal evidence.

<u>Materials:</u>

Worksheet

<u>Activities:</u>

1. Display the word "immigration" on a whiteboard or projector. Have students take a minute to jot down any ideas or themes that come to mind.
2. Elicit student responses and create a graphic organizer on the whiteboard. Alternatively, you could create a word cloud, or write responses on a posterboard or piece of butcher paper. This is a chance for the instructor to have a discussion of common ideas and concepts related to immigration to the U.S. ("mythology").
3. Distribute the handouts, and have students compare their answers to the "Immigration Myths" chart, marking down where the class had expressed a common myth about immigration.
   a. Have students compare their answers in groups of 2-4 and share out.

4. After students have completed the "Immigration Myths" activity, have them read through the findings from *Streets of Gold* and answer the questions.
5. Elicit student responses to the material.
6. Have students write their summary paragraph of what they learned about U.S. immigration patterns. In groups of 2-4, students will read their paragraphs aloud and have a discussion about the day's lesson.

Immigration Myths Chart

Immigration Myths	Did the class say this?
Immigrants to Ellis Island arrived with little to no money	
Immigrants to the U.S. experience "rags to riches" story often	
Immigrants today are slower to integrate into U.S. society and culture than immigrants before	
Immigration hurts American workers	
Immigrants achieve immediate economic success	
Immigrants make up a larger percentage of the population today than a hundred years ago	
Immigrants to the U.S. always stayed in the U.S. permanently.	
Respond to the following prompt: did the class bring up any of these ideas? Which ones? Why do you think that is?	

Streets of Gold is a book by economists Leah Boustan and Ran Abramitzky, who do research for Princeton and Stanford, respectively. In their research, they used computers to analyze millions of records of genealogy to find common patterns in immigration to see if these myths held up to data-driven scrutiny. This approach uses big data to study immigration patterns. Their research suggests that these myths are just that: myths.

Read the following findings from their research and answer the questions:

Findings from *Streets of Gold*:
- "...the nostalgic view of immigrants moving quickly from rags to riches does not fit the facts. Second, newcomers today are just as quick to move up the economic ladder as in the past, and immigrants now are integrating into American culture just as surely as immigrants did back then. And finally, immigrant success does not come at the expense of US-born workers." (page 9)
- Immigrants from the past did not rise economically as quickly as is often portrayed. "The true ascent for immigrant families happens in the next generation." (page 9)
- Most Americans can trace their immigration to two spikes related to changes in U.S. Immigration laws: in the late 1800s to 1920, and from 1965 to today. The big difference is that in the first spike, immigrants came largely from Europe, and from 1965 onward immigrants are coming largely from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.
- In 2020, about forty-five million people in the U.S. were born in another country, which was around 14% of the population, or one in seven people. That percentage is the same as it was in 1920. (page 33)
- Slow, incremental progress is a more typical experience for immigrants than the "rags to riches" story. (page 59)
- Children of immigrants are often more upwardly mobile than the U.S. born. (page 79)
- According to the authors, "assimilation" is defined as: "...the process by which the behaviors and attitudes of immigrants grow more similar over time–or converge–to those of the US-born population." (page 108)
- Immigrants assimilate quickly into the broader U.S. culture. (page 136)

Summarize the main research findings of Streets of Gold in a paragraph:

In the table below, write 3-5 myths about immigration. Then, in the second column, write the reality based on the big data analysis used by *Streets of Gold*.

Myth	Reality

Write a paragraph detailing what you learned about immigration to the U.S. from today's lesson.