



# Óyeme, the Beautiful

# *Óyeme, the Beautiful*

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# ¡ÓYEME!

## **¡Óyeme! Learning Guide**

Dear Educators and Community Group Leaders:

This packet is designed as a resource for teachers and community leaders whose students will see or have just seen a performance of *Óyeme, the Beautiful*. The guide consists of four sections: Spotlight on Immigration, Spotlight on *¡Óyeme!*, a glossary, and resources for more information. Through background information, activities, and discussion questions, these sections are intended to spark conversation in your classroom and provide more information on immigration and what it means to be a refugee. Please use as much or as little of the following guide as you feel will benefit your students. We look forward to introducing your students to *¡Óyeme!*.

Sincerely,

Joanne Seelig  
Director of Education  
Imagination Stage

# Spotlight on Immigration

**Immigration:** The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.

**Immigrant:** A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

**Refugee:** A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

*Discussion Question:* What's the difference between a refugee and an immigrant?

## Why Immigrate?

There are a variety of factors that would cause someone to immigrate, or journey to live permanently in a foreign country. These factors belong to two categories, “**Push Factors**” and “**Pull Factors**.” “Push Factors” are causes that force someone to leave their country. “Pull Factors” are reasons someone would be drawn to live in another country. Which of these reasons are Push Factors and which are Pull Factors? Could any of them be both?

1. Rachel’s parents disagreed with the politics of their country’s leader, and they have been getting threatening phone calls. (Push/Pull)
2. Jaime wants to be able to go to a doctor who knows how to treat rare heart conditions. (Push/Pull)
3. Evan was told that if he didn’t join a local gang, his sister would be killed. (Push/Pull)
4. Raul and Simon haven’t been able to feed their children because several dry summers in a row have destroyed their crops. (Push/Pull)
5. Sara wants her children to be able to complete high school in a good school and then have a chance to go to college. (Push/Pull)
6. Mateo wants his son to have chances for a good job and a family that he never had as a boy. (Push/Pull)
7. Amanda’s parents emigrated when she was a baby and she hasn’t seen them for the past ten years. (Push/Pull)
8. Diego’s country has been engaged in a civil war for the past five years. (Push/Pull)
9. Sam belongs to a religious group whose members are being targeted for hate crimes. (Push/Pull)
10. Emir wants to start his own business. (Push/Pull)

*This activity corresponds with DCPS Social Studies Standard 11.13.5: Describe major issues in the immigration debate.*

## Why are people leaving Central America and Mexico?

The child migration crisis has brought over 100,000 unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children to the U.S. in the last two years.

The majority of these children come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This region of Central America is called the Northern Triangle.

Nearly 10% of the Triangle's 30 million residents fled their homes over the past decade.

Most have traveled north; according to an analysis last year by the Council on Foreign Relations, the number of people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras living in the U.S. leapt from 1.5 million in 2000 to as many as 2.7 million in 2013. More than 1.2 million of them are in the country illegally, according to estimates.

Recently, the number of people from the Northern Triangle seeking asylum in the U.S. has increased so dramatically that former President Obama called the situation a "humanitarian crisis."

### [Images from the Northern Triangle: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras](#)





Joya de Ceren,  
El Salvador:  
Archaeological Site



Rigoberta Menchu,  
Nobel Peace Laureate:  
born in Guatemala,  
lifelong activist for  
indigenous and  
women's rights



Tikal: Gran Plaza and Temple I, Guatemala



Copán ruins, Honduras



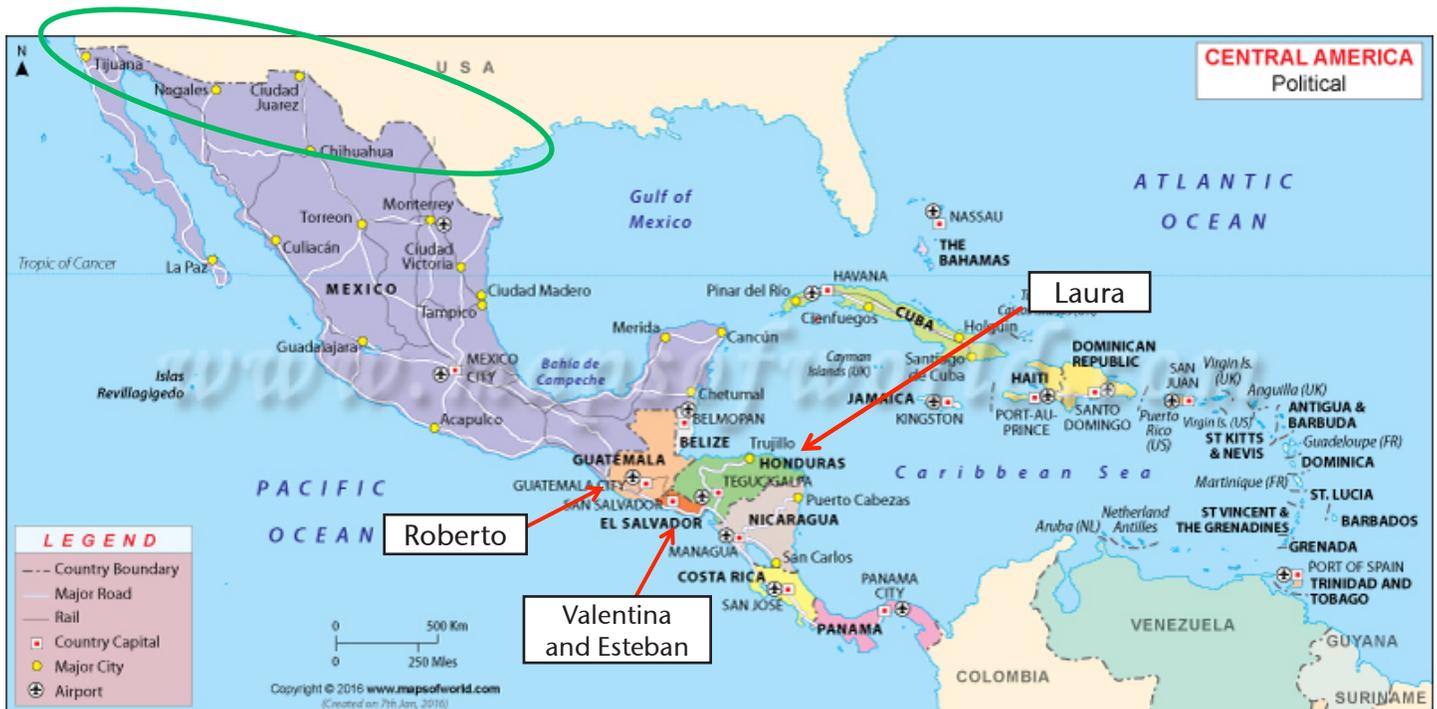
Tegucigalpa, capital of Honduras



|                                      | El Salvador   | Guatemala  | Honduras   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Population</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6.3 million</li> <li>- Most densely populated country in Central America</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over 14 million</li> <li>- Most populous country in Central America</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 8 million</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Geography</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Smallest country in Central/South America</li> <li>- Slightly smaller than Massachusetts</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- About the size of Tennessee</li> <li>- Very mountainous county with a mild climate</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capital: Tegucigalpa and Comayagueela</li> <li>- National bird: scarlet macaw; considered sacred by the Mayan people.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Known For</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parque Nacional Los Volcanes: many volcanoes including Volcán de Izalco</li> <li>- Joya de Ceren: “Pompeii of the Americas”; buried by ash during a volcanic eruption and now UNESCO World Heritage site</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tikal: Built around 600 BC and center of Mayan civilization for around 1500 years; known for the twin pyramids, Temple I and Temple II.</li> <li>- Birthplace of Rigoberta Menchu, an indigenous rights activist; won the Nobel Peace Prize</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Copán: was a Mayan political, cultural, and religious center; now a UNESCO World Heritage site</li> <li>- “Iluvia de peces” (fish rain): Yoro region; fish fall from the sky every May of June; perhaps are really forced up from underground bodies of water by the preceding heavy rains</li> </ul> |
| <b>Economy</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Known for good coffee</li> <li>- Tourism is fastest growing part of economy</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Known for high quality coffee</li> <li>- Large exporter of bananas</li> <li>- Biggest economy in Central America</li> <li>- Poverty rate: 59.3% in 2014</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poverty rate: 65% with high income inequality</li> <li>- Economy dependent on remittances</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Immigration Rates and Factors</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2016: 14,343 unaccompanied minors from El Salvador entered the U.S.</li> <li>- Highest levels of immigration occurred during the civil war (1979-1992), when 25% of the population migrated or fled</li> <li>- Around 25,000 people still immigrate each year</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2016: 15,243 Guatemalan unaccompanied minors were taken into custody by U.S. Border Patrol</li> <li>- Civil war: 1960-1996; began with U.S.-backed coup in 1954</li> <li>- 200,000 people killed; majority Mayans</li> <li>- Many immigrated as a result</li> <li>- Left behind a weak government that lacks the financial resources to meet the needs of its people</li> <li>- Since the war, many immigrate for economic reasons</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2016: 8,128 Honduran unaccompanied minors found at the U.S.-Mexico border</li> <li>- Over half of Honduran immigrants have arrived in the U.S. after 2000, and over 60% are not there legally</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Crime</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homicide rate was 104 per 100,000 in 2015, a nearly 70 percent spike over 2014</li> <li>- Authorities blame killings on rival gangs involved in drug trafficking, extortion rackets, and other criminal activity</li> <li>- Gangs (las maras) have a heavy presence in poor neighborhoods across the country and have increasingly moved into rural areas as well</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Violence from drug traffickers, gangs, and organized crime</li> <li>- One of the highest rates of femicide (murders targeting women and sometimes involving rape, torture or mutilation before death)</li> <li>- Homicide rate in 2015: 36 deaths per 100,000 people, with 5,718 deaths all told, which was a decrease from the previous year</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highest murder rate in the world in 2013; has since fallen</li> <li>- Part of the primary smuggling route used to transport cocaine from South America to the U.S. for sale</li> <li>- Suffers from gang violence and governmental collapse; around 65,000 gang members in the country</li> </ul>     |

## The Journey (El camino)

The characters in the play travel from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.



In order to arrive in the U.S. from countries in the Northern Triangle, immigrants must travel thousands of miles across the length of Mexico just to reach the U.S. –Mexican border. The journey involves crossing into the U.S. through the Rio Grande Valley along Texas’s southern border with Mexico. An alternative journey involves a trek through Arizona’s Sonoran Desert.

## What happens once immigrants arrive in the US?

There are around 11.1 million undocumented immigrants from around the world living in the U.S. Of these, 1 million are undocumented minors and 5.5 million are children with at least one undocumented parent. For these people, the lack of legal documents means that they are unable to vote or obtain a driver’s license, and live with the fear that they could be detained by ICE and deported at any time. For children with undocumented parents, there is the added stress of knowing that their parents could be deported, splitting the family.

The number of undocumented children arriving in the U.S. has overwhelmed the American systems designed to process them. Many of them come trying to join parents or family already in the U.S. Once they cross the border, most of the children are caught by the Border Patrol, often because they turn themselves in. They are held in what are supposed to be short-term holding areas, concrete rooms without beds. The legal limit for how long children can be held in these facilities is 72 hours. After this point, they are transferred into the custody of Health and Human Services (HHS), which will try to unite them with their families.

*This information corresponds with Common Core Social Studies grades 9-12 Geographic Skills.*

## Making Connections

The stream of unaccompanied minors is not only occurring from Central America to the U.S. Have students look online or in newspapers for articles about the refugee crisis in Europe.

**Discuss:** What are similarities and differences between the immigration to America and to Europe? Think about how the immigrants are arriving, why they are immigrating, where they are from, what happens when they arrive, etc.

**Optional Extension:** Look at the politics of immigration. Divide students into two groups. Designate one to be politicians in favor of more flexible immigration policies, and the other group to be politicians who are in favor of more restricted immigration policies. If the class is large, you could have more than two groups, with other students taking on the roles of the other stakeholders – recent immigrants, citizens in the immigrants’ countries of origin, citizens in the country where the immigrants arrive, etc. – and debate the issue.

### Example Sources:

- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-the-refugee-crisis-turned-waiters-into-goatherds-on-the-greek-islands/2016/07/27/f5fcbf00-3c92-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/how-the-refugee-crisis-turned-waiters-into-goatherds-on-the-greek-islands/2016/07/27/f5fcbf00-3c92-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb_story.html)
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>
- <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/04/europe/g20-europe-refugees/>

*This activity corresponds with Common Core Language Arts Standards Grades 9-12  
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas  
Comprehension and Collaboration*

# Spotlight on ¡Óyeme!



## ¡Óyeme! Program

*¡Óyeme!* is a collaborative project that responds to the surge of refugee children fleeing violence in Central America who have arrived in Montgomery County. Many of the children have experienced horrific circumstances in their country of origin as well as in the migration here. Our project partners include Imagination Stage, The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF), Montgomery County Department of Recreation, Councilmember Nancy Navarro, and the Department of Health and Human Service's Street Outreach Network (SON).

*¡Óyeme!* strives to provide a creative arts outlet for young people, utilizing best practice, culturally-based, trauma-informed theatre and arts activities to create a sense of community among the participants, and provide a safe space for immigrant youth to share their stories. Our hope is that as a result of our efforts not only can the children feel welcomed, but they also can begin the healing process that will allow them to assimilate into their new community. *Óyeme, the Beautiful* is informed and inspired by the stories of students in the *¡Óyeme!* program.

The following Creative Expression section includes activities that have been used with students in the *¡Óyeme!* program to help them tell their stories. Try them with your students to give them a chance to reflect on the content of the show and how it relates to their lives and experiences.

## Creative Expression

### Cultural Mapping

The challenge of building a new home and community in the U.S. is something that all of the characters in the play struggle with. In this activity, students will think about their own sense of place and belonging. Give each student a blank sheet of paper. Tell them to draw themselves in the center (it can be a stick figure). Around it, have them draw various different places from their community, or some other place they consider home, using the following prompts:

- a. Draw a place where you love to eat.
- b. Draw a place where you feel happy.
- c. Draw a place where you like to go with friends.
- d. Draw a place where you feel unwelcome.
- e. Draw a place where you feel safe.
- f. Draw the place where you live.
- g. Etc. (Continue with any other locations you would like).

Next, have students pair with a partner and share their map, giving their partner a tour of their community.

## Sense Memory Poems

When they feel overwhelmed, Laura and Valentina recall things about home – a yellow blanket, playing with cousins, a grandmother – to relax and create phrases that they can repeat to themselves in moments of stress. Have students think about things that remind them of home and/or family to create their own mantra. Use the following prompts to allow students write a free verse poem:

When I think of home:

I smell....

I taste...

I hear...

I see...

I feel...

I remember...

I think....

Students will not write the prompt into their poem, just the phrase(s) that follow. Students can also reorder their phrases in any way they choose, or add more than one phrase for a single prompt. Allow students to share with the class or with a partner.

## Group by Number

For this game, you will need a room that provides enough space for students to safely move around.

Tell students to scatter themselves around the room, and that they will be moving around, then forming groups of various different numbers. The groupings will not always be an even split of the class, meaning that someone will be left out.

Tell students that those who do not find a group should stand to the side until the next rotation. Then allow them to begin moving around, perhaps with music playing.

After a few seconds, call out “make groups of (number of your choice; between 2 and 7 works well).” Students should form groups as quickly as possible and those without groups should go off to the side. Have the groups do a short activity or answer a question each time they group up. For example:

- a. Who is your favorite family member?
  - b. What is your favorite place in your house?
  - c. What is something I wouldn't know by looking at you?
  - d. What are your rose (something good), thorn (something not so good/frustrating), and bud (something you're looking forward to) at this moment?
  - e. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- This should only take about 30 seconds. As groups finish, announce to the class, “These students (name them) were left out of the groups. As we switch groups this time, we need to take care of them and make sure that they are not left out again.”

After repeating the group making as many times as desired, discuss the following questions:

- How did it feel when you were part of a group?
- How did it feel when you were one of the people who were left out?
- What strategies did you use to keep the same people from being left out multiple times in a row?

## Discussion Questions (to be used after viewing the performance)

1. Why did Laura’s and Valentina’s families send them to the U.S.?
2. What do you think Laura/Valentina/Roberto/Esteban’s hopes and dreams for living in the U.S. are? What does the “American Dream” represent?
3. Laura and Valentina hold on to certain images from their countries of origin (Volcán Izalco, etc.). What images would you use to represent your country, either the U.S. or another country you consider home?
4. Everyone has an immigrant in their family history. What is your immigration story?
5. If Valentina/Laura/Roberto/Esteban were your classmates or friends, knowing the kinds of challenges they faced in the play, what advice could you offer them? How could you make them feel welcome? What could your school do to make them feel more welcome?
6. What are examples of bullying that we see in this play? Have you ever felt different or like you didn’t fit in? What would you tell Laura or Valentina if you could?
7. In what ways can you relate to Laura/Roberto/Esteban/Valentina’s stories?
8. If you were to create a shield, what would your symbol of strength be? Why?
9. Think about the scene between Esteban and Valentina that occurs near the end of the play. Esteban is struggling with the question of gang involvement, and they talk about what the reality of their time in the U.S. has been. How do you think this scene resolves? What did Esteban decide? What else could Valentina have said to him?  
 (Optional extension: Have students write the script for an extended scene where Esteban makes a clear choice. What happens next?)

*The play and post show discussion can correspond with DCPS Social Studies Standard 12.8 and 12.9.1 connecting to civil society and rights and responsibilities.*

## Glossary

**La Bestia (the Beast):** Otherwise known as “El tren de la muerte” (the Death Train), this refers to freight trains that travel north across Mexico, crowded with immigrants trying to reach the U.S. border. The journey involves risk of physical injury or death from trying to board and ride on the train, as immigrants usually crowd onto the roof or cling to the sides. In addition, the routes are often controlled by gangs, who extort or brutalize travelers. For women in particular, there are added risks of sexual assault or abuse during the journey across Mexico.



**Chanchi:** Latino/a students who have been in the U.S. longer and consider themselves to be American use this insult against recent arrivals. A very offensive, hateful word, it literally means a “dirty animal” or “pig”, and reduces the recent immigrants to an inferior status.

**El coyote:** Also referred to as a human smuggler, these are people who guide and/or arrange transportation for immigrants to cross the U.S.-Mexico border without the legal papers. In contrast to human trafficking, which involves forcibly transporting someone, immigrants pay the coyotes to transport them. However, as the situation with the drug cartels becomes more dangerous, coyotes may take advantage of immigrants, forcing them to work in certain jobs to pay back the cost of the border crossing, which can be several thousand dollars.

**Immigration:** The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country.

**Immigrant:** A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

**Las maras:** Spanish for gangs. These groups are notorious for their violence and murders, and are often involved in the drug trade.

**La migra:** Spanish slang for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the group responsible for enforcing federal laws that control borders, customs, trade and immigration.

**Quinceañera:** The quinceañera (which can refer to the girl and the occasion) is a traditional celebration from Mexico and many other Central and South American countries. It occurs when a girl turns 15, and represents her transition from childhood to adulthood. Many family and friends are invited to attend what can be a very elaborate event. The celebration begins with a religious ceremony, which is followed by a reception that usually includes food and music, including a special choreographed waltz performed by the quinceañera and her court. The court is made of up close friends and family members of around the same age, and can include boys (known as chambelanes or escortes or galán) or girls (damas) or both. The members of the court wear gowns and tuxedos,



while the quinceañera wears an even more elaborate ball gown as well as a tiara. Two traditional events that may be included in a Quinceañera are the Last Doll and the Changing of the Shoes. The Last Doll is a Quinceañera doll that the girl either receives to keep as a memento, or a doll that she symbolically passes on to a younger female relative. In the Changing of the Shoes, her father or a close male relative will help her exchange her flats for heels. Both of these moments are symbolic of leaving behind childhood and accepting the responsibilities of a young woman.

**Refugee:** A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

**Remittances:** Money that immigrants send back to their families still living in the country from which they emigrated. This money plays a large part in the economy of the Northern Triangle countries.

## Resources for Further Information and Support

### **CARECEN: Latino Resource and Justice Center**

<http://www.carecencdc.org/>

A community organization that empowers local Latino/as by providing information on housing, immigration and citizenship.

### **CASA MD**

<http://wearecasa.org/>

A community resource centered around the Latino community that provides various classes and support systems.

### ***Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario**

<http://www.enriquesjourney.com/>

Tells the story of one boy's immigration experience trying to join his mother in the U.S. (There is an adult and a YA version available).

### **Health and Human Services Street Outreach Network**

<http://admin.infomontgomery.org/query/programs.aspx?PrgID=771>

A community based organization designed to offer programming as an alternative to gang involvement.

### **Kids in Need of Defense**

[www.supportkind.org](http://www.supportkind.org)

This program offers ways to get involved in helping unaccompanied minors who have immigrated to the U.S. and provides legal aid to children in deportation proceedings.

### **The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing**

<http://www.wendtcenter.org/>

This center provides programming for children and adults dealing with grief and loss.

### **Which Way Home**

<http://whichwayhome.net/>

A documentary about unaccompanied minors traveling to the U.S. from Central America.

### **Whose Child Am I?: Unaccompanied, Undocumented Children in U.S. Immigration Custody**

by Susan Terrio

Follows several Central American children as they flee violence at home to come to the U.S. and then encounter the complexities of the legal system surrounding immigration.

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>

An article that gives a detailed overview of Central American immigration to the U.S.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/19/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

Brief set of statistics about undocumented immigrants.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/02/24/131645/they-are-refugees-an-increasing-number-of-people-are-fleeing-violence-in-the-northern-triangle/>

An article providing graphs and statistics on the violence refugees from Central America are fleeing.