

YOUR AMERICAN DREAM

To The Teachers:

Two years ago, my wife, Lilly, and I established the Merage Foundation for the American Dream. We believe its mission is important to the nation and its citizens. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting expanded opportunities for immigrants. It hopes to inspire young immigrants to achieve their American Dream. It hopes to help promising immigrant leaders contribute to their communities and to the nation. It hopes to encourage Americans to understand and celebrate the contributions of immigrants to America.

The Foundation's initiatives include:

- The development of award-winning DVDs and educational materials (The American Experience) concerning the history of immigration and the lives of successful American immigrants for use in high schools throughout the nation.
- The provision of stipends and the creation of a Merage Fellows program for outstanding graduating immigrant students nominated by 21 universities throughout the country.
- The development of occasional papers and the convening of Forums concerning the impact of immigration on America and issues concerning immigration.

We are delighted that you want to use the DVDs and educational materials in your classrooms. Paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American author, the Merage Foundation hopes that the American Dream Experience will help students walk with their feet, work with their hands, speak their own minds and reach their own aspirations.

Paul Merage
President

To The Teachers:

The Merage Foundation for the American Dream is pleased to send you DVDs and related educational materials for The American Dream Experience. Both describe in vivid terms the history of immigration to America and the lives and contributions of living American immigrants. Both reflect an effort by the Merage Foundation to create a library of DVDs and educational materials for high school teachers and principals throughout the U.S. Based on use of both in over 1200 classrooms last year, the Foundation believes that the American Dream Experience will inspire students—including immigrant students and students from immigrant families—to define and achieve their American Dreams.

We hope that teachers will incorporate the DVDs and educational materials in their lesson plans over a period of several weeks. We encourage teachers to invite local immigrant leaders to watch the DVDs and discuss their content with students. We urge teachers to involve all students, whether immigrants or not, in the planned activities related to the DVDs. Students, if they are not immigrants or children of immigrant families, are likely to be able to trace their roots back to immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. The Foundation welcomes teacher feedback concerning the impact of the American Dream Experience in the classroom.

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THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

ISABEL ALLENDE: Exile, Traveler, World-renowned
Author, Foreigner, Immigrant, and American



Isabel Allende

SECURING THE MOST FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

The Merage Foundation suggests that teachers consider the following approaches to enrich

The American Dream Experience for students.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION:

The American Dream Experience has been created for use with tenth- and eleventh-grade students. High-school students are mature enough to grant thoughtful attention to the important themes explored in the DVDs.

History, government, and civic classes provide the best settings in which to initiate *The American Dream Experience*. But teachers may want to carry out the program in other classes and in larger school assemblies or forums. What is most important, given the content of *The American Dream Experience*, is that the chosen settings include a relatively large number of immigrant and first-generation students.

INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL LEADERS:

Students will benefit from the classroom participation of successful local government, business, and non-profit leaders who are immigrants. They should be invited to watch the DVDs and engage in

classroom discussions. The guests should be asked to compare their experiences with the experiences of the individuals profiled in the DVDs. The Merage Foundation will gladly assist you in identifying local leaders who are immigrants if you need such assistance. Please call (949) 474-5882 for additional information.

INCREASING STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY IMMIGRANTS:

The DVDs are each different. The content of each DVD reflects three similar themes. The Foundation suggests that teachers organize their proposed lesson plans around these three themes. The themes are: "Leaving Behind Memories and Places," "Building a New Life in the United States," and "Achieving the American Dream."

THEME ONE: LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

The DVDs highlight the reasons why immigrants emigrated to the United States. Some sought freedom and opportunity; some sought security; some sought a better life for themselves and their families. Memories of their places of origin are critical for some immigrants. They provide a way to



Isabel in Chile

reduce loneliness. They offer a means to retain valued aspects of their culture, as well as their religion and ethnicity while becoming American. Sometimes, however, immigrants leave behind memories of persecution, intolerance and violence. Often, these immigrants want to forget their memories and build new ones in the United States.

THEME TWO: BUILDING A NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

The DVDs focus on how immigrants build new lives in America. Life was not always easy for many immigrants. They faced severe difficulties related to discrimination and racism. But America also offered safety, freedom of religion, a predictable legal system, educational and job choices. Most immigrants found it difficult to learn and sometimes to think in English. Almost all immigrants, particularly young immigrants, made learning English a priority. They knew that mastering English was a key to their educational and job or career success. They worked hard to do well in school. Many immigrants chose to develop and pursue their American Dream. They built decent lives for themselves and their families. They contributed to America.

THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The DVDs provide historical examples of how immigration has fueled the nation's economic growth, enriched its culture and politics, and provided leaders and workers for its businesses and educational institutions. The DVDs present the personal stories of immigrant leaders who achieved their American Dreams, including an accomplished, prize-winning editor and journalist; a world-renowned scientist; and an internationally-acclaimed author. The lives and the achievements of the immigrants profiled provide all students with wonderful role models.

SCHEDULING THE DVDs:

The four DVDs are approximately 20 minutes in length. Each DVD can be shown and the planned activities initiated independently. But, teachers should think about coordinating the DVDs and planned activities over a three- or four-week period. The DVD concerning the history of immigration provides planned activities relevant to its content. They are different than the planned activities for the DVDs profiling individual immigrants. If the DVDs that focus on individual immigrants are shown as part of a **coordinated** lesson plan, teachers would:

- ask students to participate in the group and classroom discussions proposed as planned activities (see *Theme One: Leaving Behind Memories and Places* below) immediately after showing each DVD.
- have students prepare only one diary describing their immigration experiences or those of their family members (see *Theme Two: Building A New Life in the United States* below). The diaries would compare these experiences with the immigrant leaders profiled in each of the DVDs. Key categories for description and comparison in the diaries should be similar to those provided in the discussion of planned activities in *Theme Two*. They will help students organize the milestones in their lives or the lives of their parents and the profiled immigrants (e.g., learning English, finding a job, etc.).
- get students to interview one group of community leaders who are immigrants to learn about their experiences and achievements (see *Theme Three: Achieving The American Dream* below). Help students select interviewees from their or their parents' countries of origin. Questions students might ask are provided in the *Theme Three* planned activities.

Each set of educational materials contains resource citations. Teachers should review them. The cited books, articles and Web pages suggest possible background reading assignments for teachers and students.

ISABEL ALLENDE: Exile, Traveler, World-renowned Author, Foreigner, Immigrant, and American

Background: *Hispanics and America: Early Arrivals, Increasing Numbers, and Increasing Diversity* Students should know that Spanish-speaking explorers were among the first explorers that came to the United States. Their explorations began in 1513, well before the United States was an established nation. Their efforts led Spain to claim vast areas of Central and South America as part of the Spanish Empire.

Mexico's successful declaration of independence from Spain in 1821 granted the new Mexican nation authority over large parts of the Spanish territory. After losing its war with Texas in 1836, Mexico's hold over the southwest areas of the United States, including what is now California and New Mexico, weakened significantly. In 1845, the United States annexed Texas. Mexico and the United States went to war between the years 1846-1848 to a large degree because of competing land claims. The United States won the war. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo awarded the U.S. the territory which is now California, Nevada, Utah, much of New Mexico, Arizona, and part of Colorado and Wyoming. At that time, the northern boundaries of Mexico became essentially what they are today. Thousands of Mexican citizens resided in areas which were ceded to the United States. Upon statehood, they became citizens of the United States. Despite discrimination, they contributed much to the development of the western United States.

Today, thirty five million Hispanics live in the United States. They constitute over 13% of the United States' population. They are the largest and one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States. Mexico is the country of origin of nearly sixty percent of all Hispanics. Nearly 10% of Hispanics trace their roots to Puerto Rico.¹ Other Central and South American nations contribute relatively small percentages to the United States population.

Immigration from Central and South America has varied over the years. The total numbers, generally, have depended on: U.S. public policy; U.S. immigration

Class Discussion Prompts:

Before teachers show the DVD and begin the planned activities, they should:

1. highlight the important events in Isabel Allende's exciting and productive life. They should make sure that students know she is a Latino who emigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela. But they should also know that while she was born in Peru, she considers Chile her native country. Isabel Allende lived in many countries as the wife of a diplomat. She saw violence and poverty first hand. Ms. Allende fled Chile because her uncle who was then president died in a successful coup attempt. Isabel Allende considers herself bicultural. She respects the loyalty, warmth and family values of her Latino culture and the freedom, opportunity and stability provided by America. Ms. Allende has become one of the world's most accomplished and respected authors. She also continues to advocate for women's and immigrant rights.
2. help students understand the meaning of several terms used by Isabel Allende in the DVD, including *freak*, *becoming American*, *trust baby*, *political refugee*, *coup*, *extended family*, and *bicultural*.
3. ask students if they can define their American Dreams. If it is difficult for students to do so, teachers should ask students about their hopes concerning their education, jobs, family, and contributions to the community. Teachers should encourage students to think about and develop their American Dreams as they continue their education. Teachers should ask students to see if they can define Isabel Allende's American Dream as they view the DVD on her life. Teachers should indicate that American Dreams help provide direction.
4. reinforce how many Latinos there are in the United States and some of the differences in their backgrounds. Discuss with your students how United States laws and policies have affected immigration of Latinos to the United States over the years.

laws; the changing economic, political, and social conditions both in the United States and Central and South American nations. Since immigration reforms in the mid-1960s, relatively large numbers of immigrants from Central and South America have been allowed into the United States. Family reunification, particularly, became easier.

At times, the United States has provided refuge for immigrants fleeing dictators in their own countries. But U.S. policies and laws have not been uniform. Refugees from Cuba who indicate they are fleeing from the communist dictator Fidel Castro, for example, seem to secure more favored treatment than political refugees from other nations in Central and South America. Generally, individuals trying to emigrate for economic reasons have not found it easy to legally enter the United States. United States immigration policies and laws concerning the



Isabel with her mother and newly born brother in Lima, Peru, 1943

reunification of families and employment, particularly in agriculture and other specialized areas, have not been consistent and enforced in a uniform manner.

Illegal immigration, particularly from Mexico, has added, and continues to add to the immigrant population each year. The often dangerous journey

required of illegal immigrants sometimes results in their arrests and return to their country of origins. At times, it results in their deaths because of unscrupulous guides. For the most part, illegal immigrants come to the United States to search for jobs and a better life.

Hispanics in the United States reflect diverse backgrounds. Their literature, music, art, customs, and language and religious beliefs illustrate a rich and unique mosaic. Hispanic immigrants have helped build and revitalize our cities. They have enriched our culture. They have provided many respected business, science and political leaders.

Chile: Relatively few immigrants from Chile have come to the United States, particularly in recent years. Chilean politics and its economy have been reasonably stable. It is also a long way from the United States. Unlike Mexico, it does not share a border with the United States.

THEME ONE: LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

Isabel Allende is a remarkable person. She has lived through incredible experiences. She was born in Peru in 1942. Her father left home when she was only three. Her mother moved the family to Chile shortly thereafter. The family, including three children, lived with her grandfather. After her father died, her mother remarried a Chilean diplomat. Isabel's early years were spent traveling to many countries, including Lebanon, Belgium, and Switzerland. She indicates that she felt like a "freak," because she did not speak the language of each country. She was unable to fit in easily.

Isabel Allende got married in 1961. Her first child was born in 1963. She returned to Chile in 1966. Shortly thereafter, her second child was born. During her nearly ten-year stay in Chile, she authored magazine articles, worked in tele-

vision, and wrote children's stories.

Ms. Allende's cousin Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile in 1970. After a military coup in 1973 that resulted in his death, Isabel became increasingly uncomfortable living in Chile. She felt threatened because she was related to the former president. She believed that she could not express her views freely under a military dictatorship. Ms. Allende immigrated to Venezuela in 1975, where she lived for 13 years.

While in Venezuela, Ms. Allende received a call that her grandfather was dying. Because the military was in control, she could not return to Chile. She began a "spiritual" letter to her grandfather. It was intended to let him know that she remembered every story he ever told her as a child. The letter grew and became her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*. By 1987, she had written three award-winning books.

She continued writing books in Venezuela. She wrote *The House of the Spirits*, *La Gorda de Porcelana (The Porcelain Fat Lady)*, *Eva Luna*, and *Of Love and Shadows*. During this time, Ms. Allende became a world-renowned author.

Ms. Allende divorced her first husband in 1987. She later met her second husband on a trip to the United States to talk about her books. She immigrated to the United States in 1988 to join her husband and find a safe and free place to raise her children and grow as a person and as an author.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

Isabel Allende's Latino culture combined with her rich intellectual and emotional experiences before she came to the United States created many "good" and "bad" memories. These memories helped define her successful career as an author and the beautiful, creative content of her books and articles.

Ask the students to divide into small groups. Choose a student to lead a 20-minute discussion in each group. Each group should discuss what it believes are the most important events in Isabel Allende's life before she came to the United States. Have the groups discuss and respond to the following questions:

- Why did Isabel leave Chile to go to Venezuela?
- What was she able to do in Venezuela that she could not do in Chile?
- What did Isabel Allende feel like when she could not speak the language of the country she lived in? Why did she feel this way?
- Why did Isabel Allende emigrate to the United States?

Students in each group should compare Isabel Allende's journey to Venezuela and the United States with their own or their family's journey to the United States. The group leaders should summarize their group's response to the above questions concerning Isabel Allende. They should also summarize student comparisons of their or their family's immigration experiences to the United States with Ms. Allende's immigration experiences.

THEME TWO: BUILDING A NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Ms. Allende's American Dream was to build a good life with her new husband, develop an extended family and write important literature in a safe, stable, and free environment. She has been and is now eminently successful in achieving her American Dream objectives.

Isabel Allende is now a citizen of the United States. She has become American, but in her own way and guided by her own definition. She is proud that she is bicultural. Her experiences in the United States taught her to cherish its freedom—the opportunity it provides to live, speak, and write without concern. Her memories of her past have made her cherish her Latino background—its focus on honor, family, community, music, and language. She does not like the loneliness she believes is related to life in the United States. She does not accept male chauvinism that she believes is part of being a Latino.

Ms. Allende's life in the United States has been like a fast-paced movie. She has authored several well-received and reviewed books and stories, including *Aphrodite*, *The Infinite Plan*, and *Paula*. She has spoken out as a free citizen on public policy issues, particularly related to women's rights and immigration. She has traveled frequently to support her ideas. However, the core of her life has

Some of the students will not be immigrants or from immigrant parents. These students should be involved in each planned activity. Their involvement will be meaningful to them and to other students. For each planned activity, teachers should ask students to assume the role of an immigrant. They could be asked to play the role of Chinese or Vietnamese immigrants fleeing political persecution, Mexican immigrants seeking a better life in the United States, and Jewish immigrants fleeing the Nazis.



Allende with President Bill Clinton at the White House, 1997

been her family, her husband, her son—who she was able to bring to the United States when she became a citizen—and her grandchildren.

She continues, at times, to speak and write in Spanish. It helps her write with sensitivity, depth, and often humor. She notes, “Language is like blood;

It’s who you are.” Ms. Allende indicates that her books, when translated into English and other languages, need to be checked very carefully to be sure the language reflects her intent and meaning.

Isabel Allende’s life has not been without tragedy. Her daughter died of a serious illness in 1992. Ms. Allende indicates that this tragic experience caused her to grow as a person and as an author. As a result, she has created a foundation to help others.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

Isabel Allende’s Latino background, her memories, and the opportunities she found in the United States to live in freedom, helped her build a very close-knit family life. At the same time, she has been able to author profound books and advocate public policies, especially those she believes will expand opportunities for women and immigrants. Ms. Allende believes that her choice to come to the United States and the choice made by all immigrants to emigrate, has made her and them stronger individuals. As immigrants, she and they have surmounted many problems, including language differences. She and they want to be successful in their new country. They have no other choices. It is hard, if not impossible, to go back.

Ask your students to develop a diary that briefly describes their or their parents’ experiences since coming to the United States. Ask them to cover past and present experiences related to: keeping their families strong and together, learning English, pursuing an education, becoming American, and defining their American Dream. Ask them to highlight in their diaries what “becoming American” means to them and their parents.²

Students should be asked to present the highlights of their diaries to the class. The presentations should compare their family’s experiences with the experiences of Isabel Allende. Teachers should stimulate a discussion concerning the differences and similarities between student and parent experiences and the experiences of Ms. Allende in building a new life in new countries. Teachers should also ask students to discuss the importance of memories of their or their parents’ native countries in their lives. They should engage students in a discussion of the value of biculturalism and of becoming an American.

THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Isabel Allende has achieved and continues to achieve her American Dream. She has taken advantage of the freedom and opportunities in the United States, while sustaining her Latino culture and memories. She and her husband have nurtured a very strong extended family that includes children and grandchildren. She has become a world-famous author, winning numerous international and national awards for her writing. Her many books and articles have given readers new insights into themselves and their past experiences, as well as new hopes for the future. Ms. Allende is a successful advocate for the rights of immigrants and women. While participating in the making of the DVD she noted, “The only thing you have of real value is what you give away.” Isabel Allende has given away and continues to give away much of value to this country and to the world.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

Teachers should ask groups of three or four students to interview local immigrant leaders from their own countries of origin or the countries of origin of their parents. The students should ask the leaders about their present roles and how their roles contribute to the community. They should ask the leaders if they defined their American Dream when they first came to the United States and if they believe they have achieved it, or are on the way to achieving it. They should question the leaders about how, or if, their American Dream helped them succeed in their life. They should ask each leader how they overcame problems (e.g., acquiring the language, securing housing, obtaining jobs) they faced when they came to the United States, how they define “becoming American,” and if they feel they have “become an American.” Each group should summarize its interviews and present them to the class for discussion.

Hopefully, after viewing the Isabel Allende DVD and participating in planned activities, students will find it easier to talk about their American Dreams. Teachers should conclude the planned activities concerning the DVD by encouraging students to engage in a discussion concerning their American Dreams. If some students still find it difficult to participate in the discussion, teachers, as they did before students saw the DVD, should ask students to talk about their hopes concerning their future education, jobs, family and contributions to the community (e.g., their American Dreams). Teachers should foster a classroom dialogue concerning student role models. The discussion should focus on the characteristics that Isabel Allende, immigrant leaders in their community, and their own parents have that would make them good role models (e.g., courage, ability to overcome problems, willingness to work hard to achieve goals, desire to contribute to their communities and the nation, achievements, etc.).

RESOURCES

Print

Made In America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools by Lauren Olsen (New Press, 1998)

The New Americans by Michael Barone (Regnery, 2001)

The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende (Bantam Books, 1986)

Immigration from South America (The Changing Face of North America) by Tracy Barnett (Mason Crest Publishers, 2004)

Latinos: Remaking America by Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco (St. Martin’s Press, 2002)

Strangers Among Us: Latino Lives in a Changing America by Roberto Suro (Vintage, 1999)

Biographical Dictionary of Hispanic Americans by Nicholas E. Meyer (Facts on File, Inc.; 2nd edition, 2001)

Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States History by Nicholas Kanellos (Arte Publico Press, 1994)

Internet

Las Culturas
www.lasculturas.com/lib/libHistory.htm

Culture Quest
www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6676

The Library of Congress, American Memory: Immigration
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem>

FOOTNOTES and SOURCES CITED

1. “The Hispanic Population in the United States: Population Characteristics.” U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000. www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hispanic/p20-535/p20-535.pdf
2. As noted above, if teachers are showing the DVDs profiling individual immigrant leaders as part of a coordinated lesson plan, students should only prepare one diary and one set of interviews (see *scheduling the DVDs*, Pages 1-2).