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Hope in Immigrant Youth

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Hope in Immigrant Youth

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Book Reviewed:

Kleyn, T. (2011). *Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide*. It Happened to Me, No. 29. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 227pp. ISBN 978-0-8180-6984-4 (Hardcover) \$42.00; ISBN 978-0-8180-6999-8 (ebook) \$41.99.

For teen readers looking for current information about immigration in a readable, informative style, Tatyana Kleyn's *Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide* is the answer. Kleyn maintains a delicate balance between providing her readers with information they need to think about immigration issues while at the same time asking them to develop informed opinions based on these facts. In the process, readers reexamine their thoughts and possible misconceptions while reading about the actual experiences of teen immigrants and immigrant communities throughout the United States. Kleyn's long range goal is an ambitious one—to help teen readers make informed decisions.

The book consists of twelve chapters addressing various issues related to immigration. For example, separate chapters deal with immigration myths and realities, undocumented immigrants, and a multilingual United States. These are all significant issues for everyone, and teens will frequently hear about them on the news. Within each chapter, readers will find an abundance of quotes from teens, maps, graphs, charts, photographs, sidebars, and lists of recommended books and websites for further study. These features add interest and work together with the main text to support student learning.

In addition, Aragón, Bittencourt, and Johnson (2011) created a *Curriculum Companion for Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide* as a tool for high school teachers across the nation. Although not part of the present book review, it is worth mentioning that this companion curriculum offers lessons related to national Common Core Standards from the Reading and Writing for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12 sections.

In order to provide background information for teens, the book provides a rich mix of historical information, clear explanations of the vocabulary words needed to discuss immigration, and stories of immigrant teens facing a mix of experiences. For example, readers learn about the waves of immigration in this country and the push-pull factors that propelled immigrants to come to the U.S. They learn to distinguish between *immigration*, *emigration*, *migration*, and *involuntary immigration* as well as the difference between *refugees* and *asylees*. The larger issues of immigration—how to deal with the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., the use of immigration quotas, and whether English should be our official language—are made more understandable and immediate through the stories of immigrant teens. Their

stories comprise a mix of experiences involved in learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, upholding traditional customs or abandoning them, and feeling homesick and different. Above all, their stories show immigrant teens hoping for a better future.

The author consistently asks: What do you think? Why? A sampling of critical questions to promote evaluative reflection found within this book includes the following:

- “Do you think that Puerto Ricans should be considered immigrants in the United States?” (p. 7)
- “What did you learn from the immigrant stories presented here (and others you may be aware of)? What were the major similarities and differences?” (p. 33)
- “Do you think the refugee label was used accurately to describe the people who were displaced due to Hurricane Katrina? Why or why not?” (p. 82)
- “In your school experience, do teachers allow bilingual students to use their native languages in the classroom? Do you feel this is a positive or negative practice?” (p. 141)
- “How does limiting people’s right to speak languages [other than English] impact their civil rights, such as freedom of speech?” (p. 141)
- “How do you feel about the DREAM Act [Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act]?” (p. 187)

When using this book in the classroom, a teacher could have students do additional research about these questions and then write about them. In fact, the book ends with the author encouraging readers to do this. She provides a useful list of blogs and forums where teens can share their views.

Within the book, Kleyn models how to share experiences and ideas. She provides information about her family’s arrival in the United States as religious refugees from the Soviet Union. Arriving in Columbus, Ohio, she began to learn English and stopped speaking her native Russian. Only later, when she was in college, did she see the importance of being bilingual. As she concludes:

As I look back on my history as a bilingual person, I feel fortunate that I have not completely lost my native language, but I also believe that society pushed me to assimilate toward English monolingualism through hidden messages about the superiority of English. Now I see that true superiority lies in speaking many languages as well as developing an understanding of the cultures they come from (p. 129).

It is both refreshing and interesting to have an author “weigh in” on the topic under consideration. As an immigrant and current associate professor of Bilingual Education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at The City College of New York, Kleyn is clearly well qualified to do this.

Immigration is a crucial issue for all of us. In *Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide*, Tatyana Kleyn has given teens an introduction to its complexity and provided examples of how immigration policies affect individuals, families, states, and nations. By

encouraging teens to become knowledgeable and express their ideas, Kleyn has provided a useful way for them to participate in the dialogue about this significant social issue. While this book is clearly designed for teens, I also recommend it to social studies teachers as a clear, up-to-date guide for promoting informed decision making.

Reference

Aragón, M. J., Bittencourt, T., & Johnson, K. (2011). *Immigration: Stories, struggles and debates. Curriculum companion for Immigration: The ultimate teen guide by Tatyana Kleyn*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.