

# American Literature: Social Transformations

Teacher Edition



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# Teacher Edition Introduction

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Welcome to *American Literature: Social Transformations*. This teacher edition offers information, suggestions, and strategies to help you support your student throughout this single-semester English course. This course explores social transformation through the lens of racism, immigration, and environmentalism.

This course touches on social issues, discrimination, politics, and other difficult topics, which can be complicated to navigate. Use your best judgment to modify the material as needed to best serve your student.

## Supporting Your Student

In this teacher edition, you will find all the course content contained in the student coursebook as well as answers—shown in **orange**—and tips for guiding your student and assessing their work. You may want to look over the assignments and teacher edition answers for each lesson ahead of time. Some of the information may be useful in supporting your student before or during the assignments. In addition, the appendix contains information regarding academic expectations, citing sources, plagiarism, and more. Students are expected to apply this knowledge to all their work.

In this course, there are many open-ended and critical-thinking questions. This is not a “right or wrong answer” type of course. Encourage students to discuss, debate, reflect, and reconsider. If you take an active interest in the lesson topics, it can help create a more meaningful experience for your student.

It is best not to share this teacher edition with your student, as they are expected to produce original work. Any indication of plagiarism needs to be taken seriously. Make sure your student is familiar with when and how to attribute sources. These conventions are explained fully in the appendix. Although high school students should be fully aware of the importance of academic integrity, you are encouraged to review its significance with your student at the start of the course.

Students vary greatly in terms of their ability to absorb information and express themselves. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the written or creative assignments take a great deal of time. In general, students can expect to spend about five hours on each weekly lesson. If your student needs more time to complete the work, you can modify lessons to focus on fewer assignments or allow your student to complete some of the written assignments orally. Modifications like these can allow students to produce work that is of a higher quality than if they have

to rush to get everything done. Each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your student's needs. Use your judgment in culling, substituting, and adjusting as needed so that your student can meet the course's main objectives while devoting an appropriate amount of time. Keep an eye on the workload as your student progresses through the course and make adjustments so they have time for meaningful learning experiences.

We encourage you to join your student in discussing (and, if possible, reading) the assigned literature in this course. We hope this course helps your student gain insight about themselves and the world around them as they develop skills in literary analysis and writing techniques.



# Coursebook Introduction

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American culture has undergone countless social transformations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the beginning of the twentieth century, urban areas in the northern United States were transformed by African Americans who moved from the South during the Great Migration as well as immigrants who arrived from parts of Europe and Asia. In the middle of the twentieth century, many groups of people—including African Americans, women, Latin Americans, and Native Americans—amplified their longstanding efforts to achieve equality during the civil rights movement and other forms of political organizing. There were also protests against the Vietnam War and a budding awareness of environmental threats such as climate change and pesticide use. During the first decades of the twenty-first century, many of these movements took on new forms. Today, new social transformations are underway.

In this class, you will study how American literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries reflected and contributed to these social transformations. You will explore questions such as the following:

- How can studying literature help you learn more about history and current events?
- How can fictional stories or the beauty of poetic language teach you about the reality of historical struggles or tensions in contemporary society?
- How can research help you appreciate these literary works?

**A note about terminology:** The term *American* is used throughout this book to refer to someone or something from the United States. We acknowledge that people from North America, Central America, and South America are all Americans. In addition, we acknowledge that there are many Indigenous peoples in North, Central, and South America and many different terms to use when speaking of them as a group. We use the term *Native American* in this course to refer to Indigenous peoples of the continental United States.

## Course Materials

The following materials are included in the course package:

- *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, a contemporary collection of poetry and essays about the experience of racism in the twenty-first century

This course is designed for independent learning, so hopefully you will find it easy to navigate. However, it is assumed you will have an adult (such as a parent, tutor, or school-based teacher) supervising your work and providing support and feedback. We will refer to this person as “your teacher.” If you have a question about your work, ask them for help.

When you begin each lesson, scan the entire lesson first so you have an idea of what you will be doing. Take a quick look at the number of assignments and amount of reading. Having a sense of the whole lesson before you begin will help you manage your time effectively. Use the assignment checklist to keep track of your progress. Check off tasks as you complete them so you can see at a glance what you still need to do. Follow this process for each lesson.

## Academic Expectations

The appendix contains important material that you will need to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the resources in the appendix. You will find information about original work guidelines, tips on how to avoid accidental plagiarism, and details on citing sources and images.

## A Note About the Workload

Students vary greatly in terms of reading speed, reading comprehension, and writing ability. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the writing assignments take a great deal of time. In general, you can expect to spend about five hours on each lesson. If you need more time to complete the work, you can modify some lessons to focus on fewer assignments or do some of the writing assignments orally. Modifications like these will allow you to produce work of a higher quality. With your teacher’s help, each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your needs.

Keep an eye on the workload as you progress through the course. Make adjustments so you have time for meaningful learning experiences rather than rushing to try to get everything done. Consult with your teacher before making adjustments to the workload.



# UNIT I: African American Literature and Liberation

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In this unit, you will be reading a selection of writings from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Claudia Rankine. These readings will introduce you to a range of genres (different types of writing): poetry, essays, and open letters. All the readings represent personal or individual experiences that connect to larger issues in the life of the United States as a nation.

James Baldwin's open letter allows a wide and multiracial audience to learn from what a Black man wants to share with his nephew. Langston Hughes's poetry connects individual struggles to larger social forces. Claudia Rankine's poetry and essays show how race informs everyday encounters between people in the United States. Throughout this unit, you will consider how these writings help the authors further the cause of full liberation for African Americans.

In addition to reading a selection of African American literature, you will practice interpreting poems by using a set of terms and techniques that will help you develop your literary analysis skills. Although these techniques are oriented to poetry, you will find that you will be able to apply many of these ideas to other forms of writing later in the course.



## Lesson

# 1

# James Baldwin's Open Letter

## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze a piece of African American literature to determine what it reveals about American culture.
- Formulate questions that require complex answers.
- Write an open letter questioning and commenting on American culture.

## Lesson Introduction

James Baldwin is one of the most influential African American writers of the twentieth century. He was born in Harlem in 1924. Harlem is a part of New York City that has been predominantly populated by African Americans since the beginning of the twentieth century. You will learn more about the cultural riches and socioeconomic challenges of living in Harlem in this lesson and the next one.

Baldwin primarily wrote novels and essays. In addition to writing about race, he also wrote about LGBTQ experiences. Some of his best-known books are *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *The Fire Next Time*. He also wrote journalistic essays that were published in popular magazines such as the *New Yorker*. All of Baldwin's publications eloquently represent elements of the African American experience.

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read "A Letter to My Nephew" by James Baldwin.
- ☐ In your reader's journal, list questions answered in the reading and your own list of questions.
- ☐ Answer questions related to the reading.
- ☐ Write an open letter about a topic you have questions about.



James Baldwin (Image credit: Anthony Barboza/Getty Images)

## Reading

Read the following selection:

“A Letter to My Nephew” by James Baldwin

[progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew](http://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew)

Baldwin wrote this essay in the form of an open letter to his nephew. Although an open letter is addressed to one person, it is published so that other people can read it. As you read the letter, consider why Baldwin might have made this choice. What do you think he wanted to accomplish by writing about racism in the form of a letter to a family member?

Baldwin wrote this essay 100 years after the U.S. Civil War, yet he argues that real freedom has not been achieved. As you read the essay, consider what evidence Baldwin gives for this assertion. How does he make his argument believable?

## Reader's Journal

Throughout the course, you will keep a reader's journal to record your thoughts about the readings. You can use a blank journal to write notes by hand, or you can type your notes and save them in a digital file.

The reader's journal prompts in each lesson give direction, but feel free to pursue other lines of inquiry as well or elaborate on the thoughts and emotions that arise from the readings.

1. Write a list of questions about America that James Baldwin addresses in his letter to his nephew. What questions might his nephew have asked that prompted this letter?

If you are having trouble coming up with questions, try working backward—first, identify what topics Baldwin addresses in the letter, and then think of what questions he answers about those topics.

2. Write a list of your own questions about contemporary America that you personally want to learn more about. Your questions can deal with the topics we will cover in the course—racism, immigration, and environmentalism—or they can address other cultural topics that interest you. Try to come up with at least ten questions.

Aim for questions that require more than a yes/no or one-word answer. For instance, instead of asking, “Is there still racism in the United States today?” you might ask, “Why is there still racism in the United States today?” or “How does racism manifest in the United States today?”

**The reader's journal is intended to help students improve reading comprehension, retain what they've read, and explore literary techniques and themes more fully. Students will be using the notes recorded in their journals in assignments throughout the course. Journal entries can also be used as the basis for discussions about the literature and the student's experience with it.**

**It might be useful to do regular journal checks to make sure students are using it to help them get the most out of their reading. Students who have never used a reader's journal, and those who are struggling with the format may find it beneficial to have you point out journal notes they've written that are particularly relevant so they have a better idea of what will help them most in later assignments and in their overall understanding and skill building.**

## Writing Assignments

1. James Baldwin wrote an open letter addressed to a particular person but intended for a wider audience. In his letter, Baldwin argues that ignorance about the conditions of Black lives fuels racism. Why do you think Baldwin chose to address the topic of racism by writing an open letter? What were you able to learn from this open letter?

Organize your response in one or two paragraphs, citing specific passages from the text to explain what you learned.

**Answers will vary. Some students might note that the open letter invites a wider, multiracial audience to learn about the conditions of many Black people by learning about a specific family's history. This allows people who may not share this history to understand how some Black people might experience racism and discrimination.**

**When discussing what they learned from the reading, look for students to mention specific evidence from the essay and explain how that led them to their conclusions. Students might report learning about white ignorance of the condition of Black lives, the failure of white people to acknowledge the full humanity of Black people, the importance of love in overcoming obstacles, the conditions of the ghetto, and the legacy of slavery on the present.**

2. We can learn a lot about James Baldwin by reading his open letter. In this assignment, you will express yourself by writing a one-page open letter. Using the questions you generated in your reader's journal for assignment 2 as a starting point, elaborate on the theme of contemporary American culture. What questions do you have about society today? How will your questions provoke thought in your readers and form a cultural commentary? To whom will you address your letter? To whom would these questions matter? Remember to formulate questions that generate more in-depth or complex responses than a simple yes/no or one-word answer.

In addition to posing questions in your letter, explain why you think they are important. Just as Baldwin's letter does, your open letter should reveal something about yourself, such as your beliefs, ideals, challenges, dreams, and concerns.

**This introductory exercise is intended to give students a chance to brainstorm their own questions and identify areas that they are passionate about and want to explore in more detail. By framing their questions in the form of an open letter, students will think about why their questions are important to them and who else those questions matter to.**

**If your student comes up with primarily closed questions (those that can be answered with a yes/no or one-word response), help them reframe the questions to require a**

**more complex response. Starting questions with *why* or *how* can often inspire a richer exploration of the material.**

**SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. Your teacher will let you know the best way to submit your work and whether they prefer an alternative submission schedule.

You can use the following checklist when you are organizing your work submission:

- Reader’s journal: list questions from the letter; your own list of questions.
- Writing assignments: responses to questions related to the reading; your open letter.

At any time in the course, if you are unable to complete the assignments or activities as written, please contact your teacher to arrange a different option.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, let your teacher know.

**In the coursebook, students are advised to share their work at the end of each lesson. This will help them receive timely feedback. If you (or the supervising teacher) prefer a different submission schedule, make sure your student understands when and how to submit work and when to expect feedback.**

**Throughout this course, students will be developing writing skills such as mechanics, technique, and expressiveness. The following checklist can be used to assess student work, monitor progress, and identify areas that need additional support.**

**Not every piece of writing will need to display every skill on the checklist. These skills will be developed throughout the course. It is usually best to focus on a few specific skills at a time rather than overwhelm the student by trying to “fix” everything at once. Prioritize the list based on your student’s current skill level and strengths. First, call attention to skills that need fine-tuning, then introduce more advanced skills later in the course.**

**Feel free to use the writing rubric below in whatever way you feel will best support your student.**

**WRITING MECHANICS**

✓	SKILL
	Uses complete sentences
	Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types
	Demonstrates correct use of punctuation
	Shows awareness of grammar rules
	Shows awareness of spelling conventions
	Strengthens writing by planning, revising, editing, and proofreading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS**

✓	SKILL
	Identifies a story's central theme or goal
	Summarizes a story's plot
	Recognizes how story events build on one another
	Identifies how setting details influence the plot and characters and help tell the story
	Identifies the narrative perspective and its influence on how the story is told
	Analyzes how a character develops over the course of a story
	Recognizes how conflict develops and is resolved through the story
	Analyzes how the narrative arc (plot) and character arc intersect

**EXPRESSIVENESS**

✓	SKILL
	Writes with originality
	Uses precise language
	Shows intentional, careful word choice
	Uses language appropriate to the audience and writing purpose
	Demonstrates relevant and effective use of figurative language (such as similes, metaphors, analogies, imagery, etc.) and other literary devices (such as repetition, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, etc.)
	Uses descriptive language to connect the reader to the content

## Lesson

# 2

# Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance

## Learning Objectives

In the lesson, you will:

- Analyze and interpret poetry.
- Identify how poetry can be used to highlight important social issues.

## Lesson Introduction

What were the conditions in Harlem in the twentieth century that prevented many African Americans from reaching their full potential? To explore this question, you will read poetry written during James Baldwin's childhood, years before he wrote the letter to his nephew that you read in the previous lesson. By looking backward, you will learn more about the obstacles to liberation that African Americans encountered in the twentieth century.

In this lesson, you will read a selection of poems by Langston Hughes, who was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of arts and culture in New York in the 1920s. Hughes's rich body of literature is a testament to some of the terrible conditions, both physical and psychological, that Black Americans endured. Studying the poems in this lesson will allow you to learn more about their experiences.

## Reading

In this lesson, you will combine your study of poetry with an exploration of the era. Read each poem listed below. Poems often need to be reread, so spend as much time with each

### ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read a selection of poems by Langston Hughes.
- ☐ In your reader's journal, analyze two poems.
- ☐ Answer questions related to your analysis of a poem.
- ☐ Compare the theme and techniques of two poems.
- ☐ Choose a poem and explain why it interests you.



Langston Hughes  
(Image credit: Carl Van Vechten)

poem as you need to take in its meaning. Afterward, you will use the questions in the reader's journal and writing assignments to help focus your analysis of these poems.

Each of the Langston Hughes poems below can be found on the Poetry Foundation website ([poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org)).

- “Dreams”
- “Harlem”
- “I, Too”
- “Let America Be America Again”
- “Theme for English B”
- “Cross”

If you would like to learn more about Langston Hughes, you can read the following article:

“Langston Hughes”

[poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes](http://poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes)

## Reader's Journal

In addition to learning about the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and Langston Hughes in this lesson, you will also develop the ability to read any poem by practicing the active reading strategies below, which are adapted from the guidelines of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

For more information or more detailed guidance, you may consult the following article on their website:

“How to Read a Poem”

[writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/readingpoetry](http://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/readingpoetry)

You do not need to be exhaustive in your reader's journal notes. Try to focus on details that help you understand the subject of the poem and its effect on you. In your journal, you can just jot down notes—you will develop your answers more fully in the written work for this lesson.

1. After reading the Langston Hughes poems listed above, reread “Let America Be America Again.”

In your reader's journal, write down the title and author of the poem, and then write down your **first impressions** of the poem. What did the title make you think? Did it make you expect anything from the poem? How would you summarize the poem to someone who has never read it? What happens in the poem?



2. Next, analyze **word choice**.
  - a. Were there any words that you needed to look up to help you understand the poem? How did looking them up develop your understanding of the poem?
  - b. Do you see any important uses of figurative language, such as similes or metaphors? These are both forms of comparison in which a poet says one thing is similar to another thing. How does the figurative language help you understand the poem's subject? Were any of the similes or metaphors particularly surprising or thought-provoking? If so, why?
  - c. What sensory details are used? What effect does this have on the reader?
  - d. How is emotion conveyed in the poem? Is this done figuratively, by using symbolism or imagery, through physical descriptions, or in another way?
  - e. Does the poet repeat any words or phrases? What parts of the poem do those repetitions connect? How do the repetitions help you understand the poem's subject?
  - f. Do you hear any rhymes? Do they emphasize or connect any ideas? How do the rhymes help develop the poem's subject?
3. Now that you have thought about challenging or interesting details in the poem, you can think about how they fit together by analyzing the **structure** of the poem.
  - a. Is the poem divided into stanzas? Stanzas are groups of lines in a poem that are separated from others by a blank line. They are sort of like paragraphs in prose. For example, the poem "Dreams" has two stanzas.
  - b. What is the relationship between stanzas? Do they develop an idea? Do they suggest some action happening in the poem? How do the first few stanzas introduce you to the subject of the poem? How do the final stanzas serve as a conclusion to the poem?
  - c. Who is speaking the poem? How would you describe their emotional state? What are their goals? Are they speaking to someone in particular? How do you know?
4. Finally, consider the **context** of the poem. Do you know anything about the poet or the historical context of the time and place in which they were writing or that they were writing about? Is there anything you want to look up? How does this information help you understand the poem better?
5. Now, pick one additional poem by Hughes and analyze it using the same process.

**This poetry analysis is designed to help students learn to closely examine a text. Answers will vary. Look for students to identify specific words, passages, explicit or implicit messages, and themes. Discussing a poem line by line can help students develop their analytical skills. Relating specific passages to current events or individual experiences can help students recognize larger themes and connections between elements.**



## Writing Assignments

1. Draw on your reader's journal notes about "Let America Be America Again" as you answer the following questions. Write in complete sentences and well-organized paragraphs that provide detailed explanations. Use specific details from the poem as needed in your responses.

- a. What were your first impressions of the poem?

**The goal here is for students to establish a baseline understanding of the poem that they will develop and refine as they answer the rest of the questions. Answers will vary, but in general, the poem is about an African American man who expresses a desire for America to live up to its ideals of freedom and equality for all people.**

- b. The title of the poem and the first stanzas repeat the verb *let*. This verb is in the imperative mood, a verb form that is used to express commands or requests. Why does the poet begin the poem in this way? How does it establish the speaker's goals?

**Students may consider how the verb tense asks or commands the reader to do something. It is a poem that is meant to inspire action. Consequently, it may inspire readers to try to create the more equitable vision of America described in the poem. Answers will vary, so look for students to explain their rationale and connect it to their overall sense of the poem.**

- c. In the first stanza of the poem, Hughes uses two different metaphors to define what he wishes America to be. What are these two metaphors? What do each of them suggest about Hughes's ideal America?

**The two metaphors are the dream and the pioneer searching for a home. By using the metaphor of a dream to characterize America, Hughes makes the country sound peaceful and idyllic. By using the metaphor of a pioneer searching for a home, he portrays the country as a place where people can seek shelter and happiness.**

**Answers will vary. Students should explain their thoughts clearly and with sound reasoning or supporting evidence from the text.**

- d. Why does Hughes place parentheses around some of his stanzas? How is their tone different from the rest of the poem? What about the stanza in italics?

**The voice in the parentheses contradicts the ideas in the previous stanzas by stating that this ideal vision of America never existed "for me." Although the voice is not identified at first, students may see that it is the voice of someone who has been oppressed (such as a person who was enslaved or the descendant of an enslaved person), and for whom the dream of America has been withheld. The tone is more critical and negative.**

**The stanza in italics creates a dialogue—the voice in italics responds to the voice in the parentheses and asks them to identify themselves. The tone is inquisitive, but also suspicious of this voice that "mumbles in the dark" and "draws your veil across the stars."**

- e. In the eighth and ninth stanzas, Hughes starts many of his lines with the words “I am.” This repetition of words at the beginning of successive clauses is a rhetorical technique called *anaphora*. How does this form of repetition help Hughes develop his ideal of what America should be?

**Students will observe that the repetition of “I am” connects various oppressed groups: poor white people, Black people, Native Americans, immigrants, farmers, and factory workers. This allows his poem to represent the plights and voices of many people and connects the struggles of African Americans to others.**

- f. Based on your prior knowledge of African American history before the civil rights era, why do you think this poem was powerful when it was published in the 1920s? For whom do you think it was most powerful? Why? Do you think the poem remains powerful today? For whom? Why or why not?

**Answers may vary based on students’ knowledge of the era prior to the civil rights movement. Look for responses that connect the poem to students’ historical knowledge. Students may suggest that the poem was powerful in its own time because it testified to the inequalities of America that held many groups back and urged people to create a more equitable society. Students may find it powerful today because it allows them to hear the past. Alternatively, students may connect the poem to contemporary movements for social equality.**

- g. What did this analysis help you understand about the poem that you did not see when you first read it? Cite at least one specific example. After reading the poem in this analytical way, have your impressions of the poem changed from your response at the beginning of this assignment?

**Answers will vary. Look for students to reflect on their learning experience and deepen their understanding of the poem.**

2. Compare “Let America Be America Again” to the second poem you chose to analyze in your journal. Do you see similar themes in the two poems? Are similar poetic techniques used to develop the themes? What differences do you notice?

Write two paragraphs comparing the poems. Use textual quotations to support your points.

**Students may observe similar themes, such as dreams, freedom, power structures, equity, and relationships between Black people and white people. Look for students to use the analysis method from the reader’s journal activity to draw specific comparisons or contrasts.**

3. In lesson 5, you will conclude this unit by choosing another poem by an African American poet to analyze on your own. To prepare for that lesson, select a poem to focus on.

The Poetry Foundation website has a large collection of poetry available online. If you want to learn more about Langston Hughes’s peers in the Harlem Renaissance, you might begin with the following collection of poems from the Harlem Renaissance:

[poetryfoundation.org/collections/145704/an-introduction-to-the-harlem-renaissance](http://poetryfoundation.org/collections/145704/an-introduction-to-the-harlem-renaissance)

If you want to learn about African American poetry later in the century, you can look at the following collection of poems from the Black Arts Movement:

[poetryfoundation.org/collections/148936/an-introduction-to-the-black-arts-movement](http://poetryfoundation.org/collections/148936/an-introduction-to-the-black-arts-movement)

Finally, the following collection has a wide variety of poems about racial justice:

[poetryfoundation.org/collections/155298/poetry-and-racial-justice-and-equality](http://poetryfoundation.org/collections/155298/poetry-and-racial-justice-and-equality)

Select a poem, note the title and author, and write two or three sentences about why it interests you.

### SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. You can use the following checklist when you are organizing your work submission:

- Reader's journal: analysis of two poems.
- Writing assignments: responses related to your poetry analysis; comparison of two poems; your poetry selection and explanation of your choice.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.



# UNIT II: Immigration and the American Dream

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In the next six weeks, you will study the topic of immigration by reading the novel *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok and the essay *Tell Me How It Ends* by Valeria Luiselli.

Both books address the topic of immigration, although they cover different aspects of it and are written in different genres. Both works investigate and question the theme of the “American Dream.” The American Dream is a myth that represents America as a place full of opportunity where everyone can achieve success. People who ascribe to this view believe that immigrants come to the United States to pursue these opportunities.

As you read *Girl in Translation* and *Tell Me How It Ends*, you will see immigrants hoping for a better life. Yet, you will also see their sense of the American Dream change. Instead of a straightforward narrative from desperation and poverty to success and riches, you will see immigrants who wrestle with ambiguous feelings as they try to navigate belonging to multiple communities. At the end of this unit, you will draw on your own experience to explore the themes of belonging and exclusion in a short story.

## Lesson

# 6

# *Girl in Translation*, Week 1

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## Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Study narrative technique by identifying passages that reveal setting, plot, and character development.
- Analyze how an author introduces and develops characters.
- Consider the significance of historical context by researching connections between literature and history.

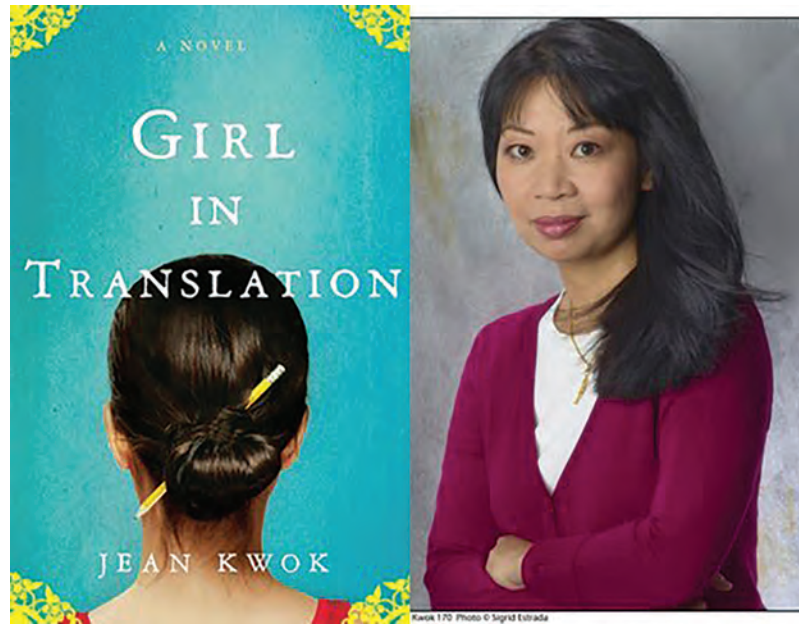
## Lesson Introduction

In *Girl in Translation*, Jean Kwok writes about the lure of the so-called American Dream and the obstacles that immigrants face when they come to America seeking a better life. Her protagonist is a young girl named Kimberly (Kim), who emigrates with her mother from Hong Kong in the early 1980s.

Besides being about the topic of immigration, *Girl in Translation* is a coming-of-age story because the protagonist starts as a child and narrates her experience of entering adulthood. By focusing on a formative period of life, coming-of-age stories show how a particular young person forms their identity. As you read *Girl in Translation*, consider how Kim's story compares to other coming-of-age stories you are familiar with. Are there commonalities as children grow into adolescents and adolescents grow into adults? How does the character's identity as an immigrant in the United States shape her particular journey into adulthood? How might your identity shape your passage into adulthood?

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read the prologue and chapters 1–5 in *Girl in Translation*.
- ☐ In your reader's journal, note examples of character development, setting, and plot.
- ☐ Analyze the narrative technique used in the book's opening scenes.
- ☐ Explain the effect of phonetic pronunciations.
- ☐ Identify the character's obstacles and challenges.
- ☐ Describe the relationships between characters.
- ☐ Research and write about the book's historical context.



Jean Kwok (Image credit: Sigrid Estrada)

## Reading

Read the following sections in *Girl in Translation*:

- Prologue (1–2)
- Chapters 1–5 (3–106)

## Reader's Journal

At the end of this unit, you will write a short story. To prepare, you will use your reader's journal to examine character development, describe settings, and analyze plot development in the books you'll be reading. By examining how skilled authors write, you will be able to generate ideas for how to approach your own story. This is called "reading like a writer" because you are examining an author's choices so that you can apply it to your own writing.

In your journal, pay special attention to these three main topics.

- **Character development:** How does the author create a sense that the character has a specific personality and identity? How are changes in the characters portrayed as the story progresses?
- **Setting:** How does the author make the setting seem vivid and realistic? How does the setting relate to the plot and characters?
- **Plot:** How does the author show what is happening in the story? Since you will be writing a short story that may only have one or two scenes, focus on how the author narrates individual scenes and how the scenes are connected.

Your notes will be most helpful if you focus on specific instances that you find effective. Jot down ideas of literary techniques you might like to use. Copy down passages, noting the page number and what you liked about the passage or why it worked. For instance, you might write something like this:

p. 11: Aunt Paula shows off her fancy tea leaves, saying “Feel free to drink as much as you like,” but then leaves out only plain tea for them to drink the next morning. This shows the aunt’s true nature. Ma’s character is revealed too when this doesn’t bother her.

Remember, your notes are intended to help you. You do not need to be exhaustive. Instead, focus on the author’s choices that you feel are especially effective.

### Guidelines for Writing Expository Paragraphs

Use the following format to write strong expository paragraphs throughout this course.

- Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that gives an overview of the main subject of the paragraph.
- The middle sentences of your paragraph should cite specific evidence from the text (with page numbers) and use your own words to analyze that evidence.
- Each paragraph should end with a concluding sentence that sums up what you expressed and states its significance or connection to other ideas.

## Writing Assignments

Respond to the following critical thinking questions by writing one or two paragraphs for each answer. Each response should feature concrete evidence from the text (with page numbers) as well as relevant topic and concluding sentences. (Refer to the box above, “Guidelines for Writing Expository Paragraphs.”)

1. Jean Kwok introduces the protagonist, Kimberly, in two different ways in the opening scenes of *Girl in Translation*. In the prologue, Kwok presents the voice of an adult Kim looking at a child in a bridal shop. However, in the first chapter, Kwok presents Kim as a child who has just immigrated with her mother to New York from Hong Kong. How does this narrative technique develop your first impressions of Kim? What does it help you understand about her immigrant experience?

**Students may note that the opening creates a sense of suspense as it leads to questions, such as the following: How does Kim turn her initial struggle into success? What is the one decision that Kim makes that changes her life? What does she want that she can’t have? Students may also note the doubling of the young Kim and the girl she sees in the window of the shop. In the prologue, the adult Kim looks at the girl and thinks, “This isn’t the life I wanted for my child” (2). In the first chapter, we see Kim lead an even harder life than the girl in the bridal shop as she has her first experiences in the sweatshops. This contrast**



gives a sense of how much Kim will overcome in the book. Generalizing from Kim's experience, students may note her ambition to lead a better life in her new country and the difficulties of achieving that goal.

The second question is open-ended. Look for students to build their impressions from concrete details in the text and to extrapolate from Kim's experience to a more general idea about immigration. Students may also consider the effect of the narrative technique of manipulating the time line to introduce an older and younger version of the main character. For instance, some may suggest that this has the effect of showing that the child's immigrant experience forms an integral part of the adult's sense of self.

2. In the first chapters of *Girl in Translation*, Kwok often presents words in italics to represent how Kim hears spoken English. For example, when Kim and her mother go to school on the first day, this is how Kim hears the directions to her classroom:

"Go *down*da hall, two *figh*ts up, classroom's *fi*rs*du*r left." (24)

On the first day, her teacher Mr. Bogart announces,

"This is a pop quick . . . Fill in *all*de capital see Ts." (26)

Why does Kwok put these words in italics? What effect do these phonetic pronunciations have on your experience of reading *Girl in Translation*?

Illustrate your response by choosing one additional example of Kwok's use of italics in the novel. (As always, remember to include the page number.)

The italics represent words in English that the young Kim cannot understand. For instance, in the second example, she cannot understand the direction to "Fill in all the capital cities" and instead hears a jumble of nonsensical sounds and words. Students may note that this effect builds a sense of empathy as it asks readers to experience the same confusion that Kim felt. Students may also note that it gives them a sense of just how difficult it would be to live in a country where they do not understand the language. There are many additional examples that students might cite where the author uses italics to represent words that Kim cannot understand in spoken English.

3. Although Kim was the highest ranked student in her class in Hong Kong, she encounters many obstacles to success in her education in America. Describe one of the obstacles that Kim faces at her public school in Brooklyn. What allows her to meet this challenge? What problems remain?

Support your answer by quoting textual evidence and providing concrete examples. Make sure to address all three elements of this assignment.

For obstacles, students may write about language barriers, the different behavioral expectations in school (for instance, Kim is much more respectful and thinks that students will help clean the classroom after school), the food in the cafeteria, being accused of cheating on a quiz, her decision to skip school for several days, being the only Chinese person in the school and not fitting in with the Black or white kids, Mr. Bogart's sexism, or assignments requiring supplies she can't afford.



**For how Kim meets these challenges, students may write about her friendship with Annette, her determination to improve her and her mother's life, and her skills in math.**

**For remaining problems, students may note her inability to afford a private school or to get into a magnet program because of her English skills. Students might also mention how poverty affects her friendship with Annette.**

4. Describe the relationship between Kim's mom and Aunt Paula. How does this shape Kim's experience of immigrating to America?

**Aunt Paula is the only source of help that Kim and her mother have. Although she has helped in some ways, many of her actions keep them at a lower level than her own family. For instance, she finds them a derelict apartment and makes them work in her factory instead of having them live in her nice home and take care of her sons as promised. Aunt Paula pretends to be helpful, but does not provide the help she says she will. Consequently, Kim and her mother live in extreme poverty with no foreseeable way out. They do not get the life they dreamed about in the United States.**

5. Based on what you have read so far, what historical context would allow you to better understand the novel? For example, perhaps you would like to learn more about sweatshop labor, common living conditions in New York tenements, or immigration from Hong Kong to the United States in the 1980s.

Pick one topic to research. Choose at least three reputable sources. Write two paragraphs about how your research allows you to put Kim's individual story within a larger context. Include a list of your sources.

**Students will use their research to gain a new perspective on the story. Look for them to make a clear connection between what they learned and the story's setting, plot, or character development.**

## SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. You can use the following checklist when you are organizing your work submission:

- Reader's journal: examples of character development, setting, and plot.
- Writing assignments: analysis of the book's opening scenes; the effect of phonetic pronunciations; the character's obstacles and challenges; the relationships between characters; and the book's historical context.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, let your teacher know.

## Lesson

# 14

## Oak Flat, Week 3

### Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze how one character's narrative arc can be used to express larger story themes.
- Research the history of a particular location.

### Lesson Introduction

The political debate between the Apache and the miners—over land sovereignty and legal ownership, and over sacred spaces and commercial interests—is the focal point of this story. However, in addition to these political and cultural debates, the voices in the book reveal the beauty and significance of this landscape. For many people, the land around Oak Flat has a transformative effect on their lives.

### ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Read chapters 10–15 in *Oak Flat*.
- ☐ In your reader's journal, add to your time line and family trees.
- ☐ Write a five-paragraph essay on the intersection of character and theme.
- ☐ Research current events related to the story.
- ☐ Conduct historical research related to your chosen place.



Oak Flat, Arizona (Image credit: SinaguaWiki)

Reviewing *Oak Flat* for the *New Yorker*, Max Norman emphasizes this element of the book as he writes,

The book has less to do with heroic resistance than with something harder to put your finger on: the numinous, world-renewing potential that some Apache feel in Oak Flat. (“Lauren Redniss and the Art of the Indescribable,” July 23, 2021)

In addition to studying how Lauren Redniss portrays this effect in her book, you’ll put this technique into practice in the next lesson by creating your own piece of nature writing that studies the ways humans have interacted with land over time.

## Reading

Read the following chapters in *Oak Flat*:

- Chapters 10–15 (164–261)

## Reader’s Journal

As you are reading, continue adding to your time line and family trees.

## Writing Assignments

1. Write an essay about how Naelyn’s coming-of-age story contributes to the conclusion of this book. Although *Oak Flat* tells the story of many different people, Naelyn Pike could be considered the central figure because of how much attention Redniss gives to her coming-of-age story. How does this narrative enhance your understanding or appreciation of the other themes in the book? How does Naelyn’s story help Redniss create a sense of hope? How does that hope relate to other narratives in the book?

Organize your thoughts in a carefully crafted five-paragraph essay. Use the following format:

- Introductory paragraph: introduce your essay’s main theme.
- Three body paragraphs: develop three main ideas (based on the questions above), highlight their significance, and cite textual evidence to support your ideas.
- Concluding paragraph: summarize your key ideas and how they connect.

Use a variety of literary techniques to make your writing engaging. Use different sentence types and an expressive vocabulary. Use the steps of the writing process—plan, write, revise, edit, and proofread—to create a polished piece of expressive and cohesive writing.

**Naelyn is a teenage political activist who models herself on traditional Apache warriors. *Oak Flat* culminates with her Sunrise Dance, a sacred coming-of-age ceremony. Redniss juxtaposes Naelyn’s ceremony with stories of the ways the U.S. government tried to suppress Native American religious observances in the past. The fact that Naelyn has her**

ceremony emphasizes her resistance to this oppressive past and shows ways in which she has preserved the traditions of her ancestors. She also seems to emerge from the ceremony with new powers.

When the godmother wipes her eyes,  
and the girl opens her eyes,  
she's not looking at the world she looked at before her dance.

She's looking at a new world. (227)

The student's essay should be a polished piece of writing, organized into five purposeful paragraphs as outlined in the assignment. Feel free to use the writing rubric below in whatever way you feel will best support your student.

### WRITING MECHANICS

✓	SKILL
	Uses complete sentences
	Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types
	Demonstrates correct use of punctuation
	Shows awareness of grammar rules
	Shows awareness of spelling conventions
	Strengthens writing by planning, revising, editing, and proofreading

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

✓	SKILL
	Identifies a story's central theme or goal
	Recognizes how subplots are connected and contribute to a cohesive whole
	Recognizes how story events build on one another
	Identifies how setting details influence the plot and characters and help tell the story
	Identifies the narrative perspective and its influence on how the story is told
	Analyzes how a character develops over the course of a story
	Recognizes how conflict develops and is resolved through the story
	Analyzes how the narrative (plot) and character arcs intersect
	Identifies key scenes that are related to the central theme
	Interprets the significance of key scenes and pivotal moments

**EXPRESSIVENESS**

✓	SKILL
	<b>Writes with originality</b>
	<b>Uses precise language</b>
	<b>Shows intentional, careful word choice</b>
	<b>Uses language appropriate to the audience and writing purpose</b>
	<b>Demonstrates relevant and effective use of figurative language (such as similes, metaphors, analogies, imagery, etc.) and other literary devices (such as repetition, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, etc.)</b>
	<b>Uses descriptive language to connect the reader to the content</b>

- Find a recent news article on a topic related to *Oak Flat*. It may be about Oak Flat or other mining operations by the companies mentioned in the book, such as Rio Tinto, or it may be about copper mining in general or the harvesting of other natural resources on land that is significant to Indigenous groups.

Write a brief description of the news article (include a copy or link) and then answer the following questions:

- How does reading *Oak Flat* impact the way you understand the news story?
- Does the story lead you to think any differently about *Oak Flat*?

**Answers will vary depending on the article the students find. Look for students to connect the article to issues raised in the book (such as Indigenous rights, management of natural resources, rural or small-town economies, family and religious traditions, etc.) and point out how ideas they gleaned from *Oak Flat* allow them to understand the larger context of the article. Alternatively, students may find that information they learned from the article deepens (or challenges) their understanding of *Oak Flat*.**

- Do historical research to learn more about your chosen place. Can local papers tell you about the ways it has changed over time? Is there a local historical society that might have information? Are there websites dedicated to the history of the place? How has it been used, and how is it currently being used? Are there any threats to the place, such as development plans that would change its character or problems related to pollution or climate change?

Take notes and summarize your most important findings in one paragraph. Include a list of your sources in MLA format. (See the appendix for details on citing your sources.)

**Students may need help finding sources for their research. The goal of the assignment is for students to gain a new understanding of their chosen location. They should come to realize that each place has a history, has probably been used in different ways over the years, and may be under threat in some way.**

**SHARE YOUR WORK**

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. You can use the following checklist when you are organizing your work submission:

- Reader's journal: notes on a time line and family trees.
- Writing assignments: five-paragraph essay; current events related to *Oak Flat*; historical research on your chosen place.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, let your teacher know.



# Appendix

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