

# AMERICAN IMMIGRATION LAWS, PAST AND PRESENT

## OBJECTIVE

Students research and analyze key aspects of U.S. immigration policy and the historical events that surrounded them.

## TIME

One 50–60 minute class period, with additional time for student research

## MATERIALS

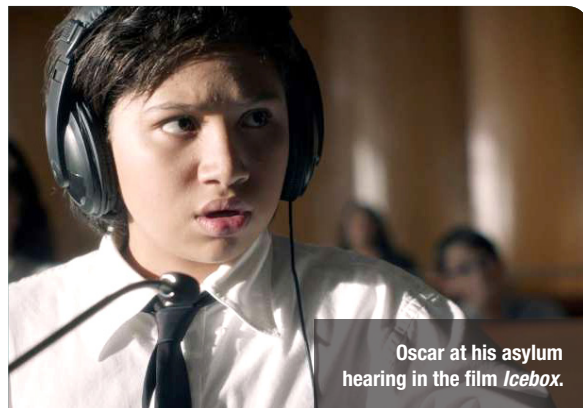
Segments of the film *Icebox* at [hbo.com/classrooms/icebox](http://hbo.com/classrooms/icebox); Seeking Asylum in the U.S. activity sheet

## STANDARDS

**NCSS** D1.5.9–12, D2.Civ.5.9–12, D2.Civ.13.9–12, D2.Civ.14.9–12, D2.His.1.9–12, D4.7.9–12.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Share the following phrase: “America is a nation of immigrants.” Ask students to consider this term historically. *What do they believe the term meant in the past? Does it have the same meaning today? Why or why not?*
2. Arrange students in small groups, and assign each group one of these key U.S. immigration laws and policies to research, focusing on its original purpose:
  - 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts
  - 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act
  - 1891 Immigration Law of 1891
  - 1917 Immigration Act of 1917
  - 1942 Bracero Agreement
  - 1953 Refugee Relief Act of 1953
  - 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act
  - 2006 Secure Fence Act
  - 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
  - 2018 Zero-Tolerance Policy
3. Have students present their research to the class.
4. **Optional Video Connection** Show three segments of the film, *Icebox*, [hbo.com/classrooms/icebox](http://hbo.com/classrooms/icebox). After viewing as a class, distribute the Seeking Asylum in the U.S. activity sheet and have students discuss the questions in small groups.



Oscar at his asylum hearing in the film *Icebox*.



Oscar, played by Anthony Gonzalez, in the film *Icebox*.

*Classroom Caution:* The film *Icebox* contains occasional scenes of violence, swearing, and sexual innuendo that may be inappropriate for some students. The three segments selected for this lesson have been slightly edited to reduce possibly objectionable content. Educators are advised to screen all content before showing to students. The full film is free to stream at [hbo.com/movies/icebox](http://hbo.com/movies/icebox).

5. Assign students one of the following prompts as the topic of an evidence-based essay they should research and write.
  - What are some of the current challenges facing both the U.S. government and immigrants who want to come to this country? Do you see similarities today to challenges of the past? Explain.
  - Identify periods of openness to immigrants and periods of restriction on immigrants. What historical events surrounded these changes?
  - The United States has been characterized as a “nation of immigrants,” yet most immigration laws are created to restrict immigration. What are some reasons Americans want to limit immigration? Which do you think are based on necessity and which are based on emotions like fear or prejudice?

# SEEKING ASYLUM IN THE U.S.

View video segments from the HBO film *Icebox* and study the journey of a young Honduran boy trying to seek asylum in the United States. After viewing the segments, use the Discuss questions in small-group conversations.



## CONDITIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

### SEGMENT 1

Twelve-year-old Oscar Fernández returns to school after being forcibly recruited by a local gang. Outside his classroom, gang members are calling for him. Then...chaos!

#### DISCUSS

- In what way is Oscar's classroom environment similar to your school? How is it different?
- How would you describe the effects of local gangs on institutions and communities like Oscar's school and the families in his town?
- Why do Oscar's parents believe sending him to his uncle in the United States is in his best interest?

## DETAINEES IN THE SYSTEM

### SEGMENT 2

Young Oscar journeys to the United States alone through a series of dangerous routes. But his quest to find his uncle is interrupted by the U.S. Border Patrol.

#### DISCUSS

- Describe how Oscar is treated by border patrol agents during his arrest and at the detention center. Why do you think he is treated this way?
- An agent advises Oscar of his rights. How are these similar to Miranda rights that criminal suspects in the United States have while in custody?
- How is being in the detention center similar and different from being held after an arrest? What does the film's title refer to?



**Refugees** are people who are unable or unwilling to return to their country for fear of serious harm.

## THE ASYLUM HEARING

### SEGMENT 3

Oscar is granted a court hearing to plead his case for asylum. The judge grills Oscar with questions that he struggles to answer.

#### DISCUSS

- What was the judge most concerned about when he questioned Oscar?
- Why did Oscar have difficulty answering the judge's questions surrounding the violence he witnessed in Honduras?
- In your view, why didn't the judge grant Oscar asylum in the United States? Do you think Oscar had a good reason for asylum? How could the hearing have gone differently?