

**Teacher’s Guide and Questions for Classroom Use from
A Nation of Nations by Tom Gjelten**

1. The author’s grandfather immigrated to the United States from Norway, following the trail of others in his family. In what ways was their immigration experience similar to the experience of people who came to the United States 100 years later, from other parts of the world? In what ways was it different?
2. According to the author, when was the United States first characterized as an “exceptional” nation, and in what sense was it considered unique?
3. In the 1950s, it was difficult from someone from Korea to get permission to immigrate to the United States. Why was Pong Suk able to do so when so many other Koreans could not?
4. Twenty or 30 years ago, almost all Koreans who immigrated to the United States to study or work chose to remain here. In recent years, however, many have subsequently decided to return to their homeland. What do you think has changed?
5. Think about the stories from Korea and Bolivia. What would you say the people who choose to move away from home have in common with each other? What distinguishes them from people who choose to stay put?
6. Immigrants are often said to take jobs that native-born American workers don’t want. Do you see examples of that in the stories that the author shares in Part One of the book?
7. Describe some of the hardships and discouraging situations experienced by the immigrants the author profiles. What obstacles do they have to overcome in order to adapt to life in America?
8. In some predominantly African-American neighborhoods, the sudden arrival of a large number of immigrant families resulted in conflict. What are some of the reasons for this phenomenon?
9. It was in America, a predominantly Judeo-Christian nation, not in his native Libya, that Esam Omeish became committed to Islam. The experience actually endeared Omeish to America, strengthened his American identity,

and contributed to his patriotism. In what ways do you think America can be a place where immigrants like Omeish deepen their attachment to their own religious traditions?

10. J.E.B. Stuart H.S. through the years has had some of the lowest average student achievement scores in Fairfax County, but minority and ESL students did better at Stuart than anywhere else in the county. How was this possible? What challenges did this dichotomy present for the school leadership?
11. Anti-immigrant sentiment has a long history in American political culture. Who were the first immigrant groups to encounter hostility in the United States? What was said about them? What efforts were undertaken by immigration opponents to limit the influx of foreigners?
12. In what ways is the current debate over immigration an echo of the debate in the early years of the twentieth century? What cultural concerns were raised about some of the nationalities represented in that big immigration wave?
13. In what ways, if any, did the enactment of national origin quotas reflect racist attitudes?
14. How did Cold War concerns influence the immigration debate in the twenty years after World War II?
15. How did domestic political considerations in the 1960 and 1964 elections affect the immigration debate?
16. The author writes, “None of the people involved in the 1965 reform of U.S. immigration policy understood what they were doing.” Explain that statement.
17. How did Cong. Michael Feighan change the original version of the immigration reform proposal, and how has that change affected the character of immigration to this day?
18. How did the pattern of immigrant settlement in the post-65 years differ from the pattern seen in the early years of the 20th century? What were the reasons for this shift?

19. The Princeton University sociologist Douglas Massey highlights two important ways the post-65 immigrant influx differed from earlier immigration flows. Please explain.
20. One issue raised by the influx of non-European immigrants in the post-1965 period was that the newcomers would not embrace America's Anglo-Protestant culture and political values and thus not make good Americans. Was this implicitly a racist argument or not?
21. What tensions between African Americans on one side and Latino and Asian immigrants on the other side became apparent as a result of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles?
22. How and where did tensions between African Americans and immigrant groups play out in the Washington DC metropolitan area?
23. What challenges did the immigrant influx in Fairfax County present to local authorities in terms of governance, law enforcement, and schooling?
24. Korean immigrants in general are far more likely to be engaged in self-employment activities in general and operate dry cleaning shops and convenience stores in particular. Why is this?
25. The modern organized movement to restrict immigration grew out of the environmental movement. What is the connection between these two causes?
26. How did the experience of Muslim Americans in Fairfax County change after 9-11?
27. What did Álvaro Alarcón, Fasih Khan, and Ho-Kwon Chun have in common?
28. What did Álvaro Alarcón learn were some of the key contributing factors in explaining some of the problems encountered by the immigrant youth he counseled?
29. The Asian and Muslim and Hispanic communities in northern Virginia rallied around political candidates who came out of their own communities

and largely voted Democratic. But one election consultant, Anil Mammen, warned Democratic politicians not to take the immigrant vote for granted. “This is a constituency whose political alliances could shift dramatically over time,” he argued. What was his reasoning?

30. The national motto for the United States is *E pluribus unum*, normally translated as “Out of Many, One.” The liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger in 1994 wrote that the danger in an excessive celebration of diversity in the United States is that it “belittles *unum* and glorifies *pluribus*. What did he mean by that? Do you think it was a valid concern? If so, why? If not, why not?

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