



Narrative Introduction to the Unit

There was once a very beautiful land. It was bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the west by the Pacific. In the east, much of the country was covered in trees and small mountains. A great river ran north to south through the middle. And in the west, prairies, deserts, and enormous rugged mountains alternated across the landscape. All this land lacked was a human population.

Then, thousands of years ago, no one knows exactly how many thousands, a group of people entered North America, traveling across a land bridge between Asia and Alaska. This land bridge is under the Bering Sea now. Gradually, the first people in the beautiful land worked their way southward and eventually settled throughout North and South America, including the area that would one day become the United States. The descendents of these first people to travel to the U.S. are considered Native Americans, because they lived in the U.S. for thousands of years before Europeans arrived in North America.

Because their ancestors lived in the United States for so many thousands of years, Native Americans are not considered immigrants. All other people in the U.S., however, are either immigrants themselves or are descended from immigrants. Immigrants are people coming from another country to live in the United States. President Kennedy and others have called America a "Nation of Immigrants."

About five hundred years ago, immigrants from other parts of the world, especially Spain, England and France, began settling in the United States. We will not, however, be studying a time quite that long ago. We are going to learn about people that immigrated to the United States around 100 years ago. We will learn about people who came to America, when they came and why, where they settled, how they were accepted and how they contributed and took part in American life. And then we will look at recent immigration, for immigration is always happening in the U.S. We will learn some of the stories of people who immigrated to the U.S. in just the past few years, in the time since you were born. (If you have a child in your class who immigrated to the U.S., you may wish to explain the unit to them in advance. If they are willing to participate on an expanded basis, this unit provides an opportunity for them to share their story, and to have their experience recognized and honored.)