

Connecting Units of Study: Honoring and Building on Students' Knowledge

Maryna Hedeem, multilingual educator and WIDA Educator in Residence, supports multilingual learners in kindergarten through sixth grade. She collaborates with the sixth-grade English language arts (ELA) teachers to guest teach during certain units. Based on her observations while teaching, Maryna reflected on how to honor and build on students' knowledge about immigration. She gathered student input from her fifth-grade multilingual learners, expanded their understanding on the topic, and connected their learning to their prior knowledge and perspectives. For her sixth-grade students, she designed an introductory activity for an upcoming unit. Through these efforts, she fostered connections across a community of learners spanning three units of study. Two units were implemented this year in the fifth-grade multilingual class, and a third will be implemented next year in the general sixth-grade ELA classes.



Maryna Hedeem

Purpose and Sequence of Units

Year 1: Heritage Unit and Preparation for Beyond Esperanza Unit

During an earlier fifth-grade unit on heritage, Maryna noticed that most of her students were able to share about their family and community foods, traditions, and religious practices. However, many were not aware of why or how their families migrated to the United States. While families may choose not to share their stories, Maryna thought it would benefit the students to deepen their knowledge of immigration in general.

Simultaneously, while visiting sixth-grade ELA classes to present books featuring immigrant youth as the main characters, Maryna noticed the sixth-grade students had many misconceptions about immigration. She thought about how, as part of an immigration unit, she and her current fifth-grade students could co-create materials that could be used in future sixth-grade ELA classes.

Year 1: Immigration Unit

Maryna planned an immigration unit for the end of the school year with several purposes in mind:

- Integrate relevant ELA content and the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework in her multilingual class
- Help her current fifth-grade students deepen their knowledge about immigration
- Prepare resources with her fifth-grade students that can be used during a sixth-grade unit titled Beyond Esperanza, which is centered on the novel *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and explores themes of immigration and resilience

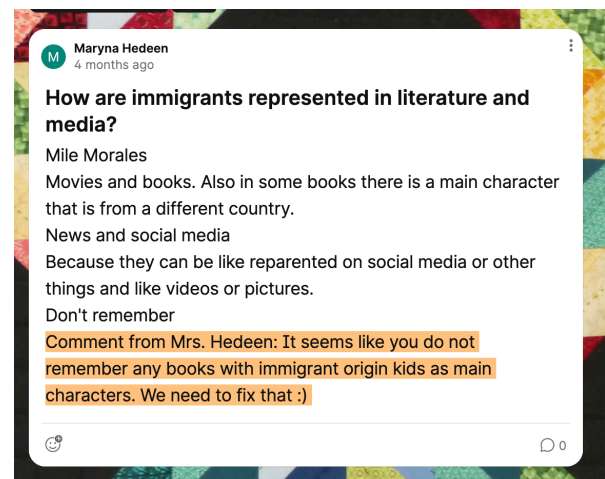
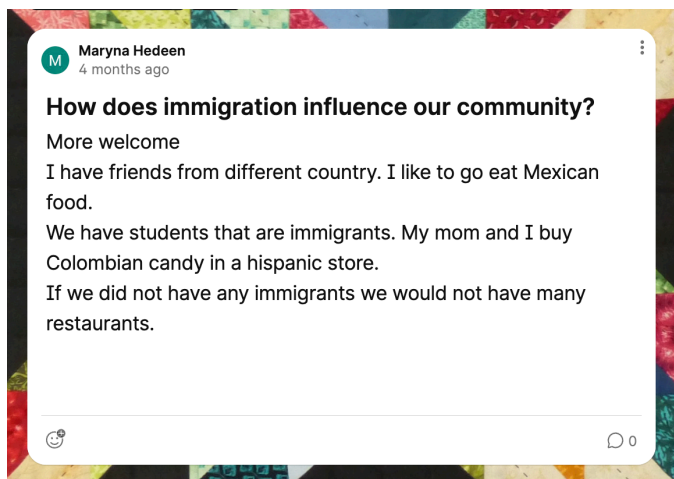
Community Quilt

Using a series of questions related to immigration, Maryna engaged her multilingual learners in an inquiry activity where they co-created a “community quilt” to document their perspectives, knowledge, and input regarding immigration at the beginning of the unit. Thinking ahead to other interactive lessons, she used two different multimodal formats to gather this information so she could compare which might work best in the future.

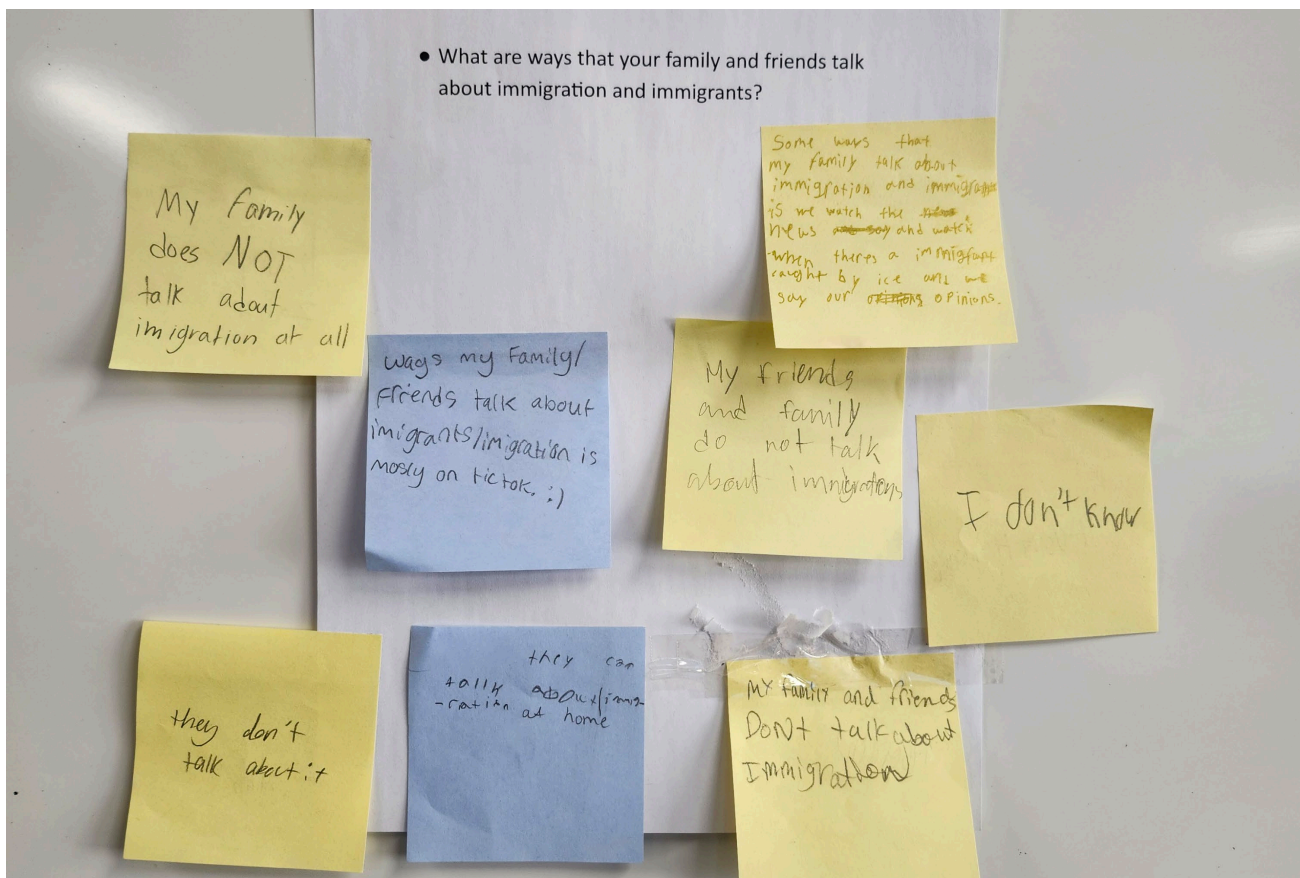
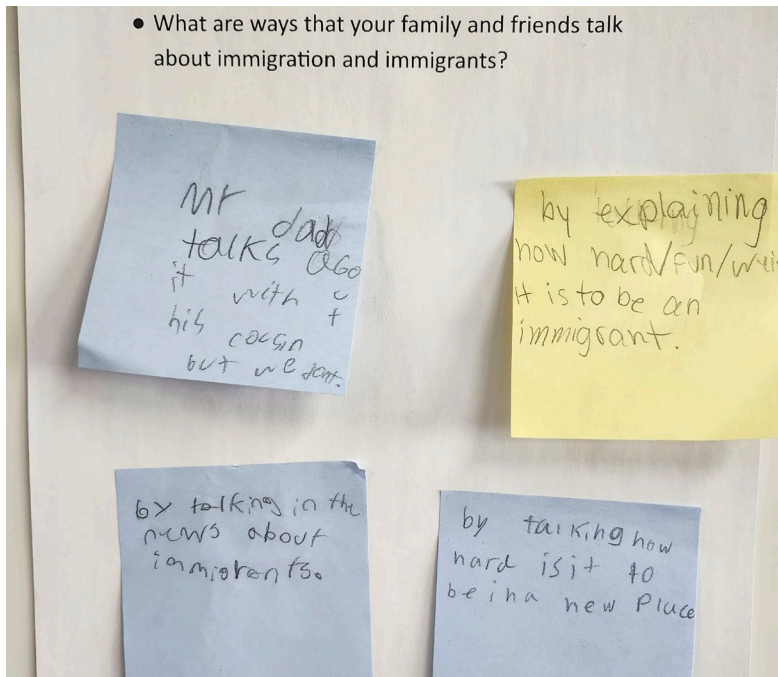
Immigration Community Quilt Questions

1. Who is an immigrant?
2. Who is a refugee?
3. What is immigration?
4. What are some reasons for leaving a country of origin?
5. How does immigration influence our community?
6. How are immigrants treated in the United States?
7. How are immigrants represented in literature and media?
8. What questions do you have about immigration?
9. Where have you heard about immigrants and immigration (school, home, media)?
10. Should we talk about immigration and immigrants? Why or why not?
11. What are ways that your family and friends talk about immigration and immigrants?
12. What questions do you have about immigration?

Padlet



Sticky Notes



Building Knowledge

The community quilt informed the content and learning of the immigration unit.

Maryna's actions

- Honored students' experiences, interests, and ideas, especially with regards to social and emotional learning
- Facilitated read-alouds and discussion using an informative mentor text
- Facilitated a discussion on the differences between an informative, neutral text and a personal memoir

Students' actions

- Allowed students to express their ideas and share personal stories
- Focused their learning on facts
- Shared ideas for the final presentation and materials

Unit Resource

Using the information she gathered from her multilingual learners, Maryna created a presentation to share with sixth-grade teachers that can be used for the sixth-grade novel unit. View the [Beyond Esperanza Unit slide deck](#).



Year 2: Beyond Esperanza Unit

The materials that the fifth-grade multilingual students co-created with Maryna can serve as valuable resources for sixth-grade ELA teachers as they teach a unit titled *Beyond Esperanza*, which is centered on the novel *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and explores themes of immigration and resilience. In conjunction with this unit, Maryna will continue to visit ELA classrooms to present other books that feature a variety of immigrant youth. In the past, Maryna has created short videos in which she and/or multilingual learners discuss these books, and she has worked with the school librarian to curate a related display in the school library. Through these efforts, she hopes to encourage sixth-grade students to read a variety of immigrant youth stories and deepen their overall understanding of immigrant experiences in the United States.