

An Educator's View On Immigration

When immigrants come to the United States, it may be for a handful of individual reasons, but there is usually one they all have in common: to better their lives and the lives of their children. They may be fleeing violence and war, either from the government or religious leaders, their family may be over in the United States, or they may simply just want to better themselves and their futures with the freedoms we have in America. When immigrants come over to the United States, they must think about their jobs or careers, their families, and their kids education. Jeffrey Goodman started his teaching career in Pasadena, California, but now teaches high school government at Perry High School, in Perry, Ohio.

Tasked with teaching government, Mr. Goodman also takes lead role in teaching immigration to his students. As a teacher, this task is not as simple as it may seem, for while the students are able to express their opinions on the topic, the teacher must seem unbiased, as a fence-sitter on the topic, while getting across the necessary information the students need to form their own opinion. When asked to reflect on the challenges of teaching immigration, Mr. Goodman replied:

Q: When you teach immigration issues to your students, what lesson do you hope they learn?

A: When I teach about immigration issues, I try my best to stay as neutral as possible and not let my own personal biases on those issues show through. I want my students to see as many sides of the immigration debate as possible. I want my students to come to their own conclusions about what is best for America.

Q: What obstacles prevent some students from learning these lessons?

A; Students come into my class having already been politically socialized from their family, friends and experiences. Things that their family and friends have said to them about immigrants (good and bad) while growing up, can affect future learning about immigration topics

Q: What strategies do you employ to overcome these obstacles in the classroom?

A: I think empathy is key overcoming obstacles. Getting students to get inside the shoes, minds, hearts and souls of immigrants is so important. Trying to teach point of view and perspective is key on all sides of the immigration debate.

Teaching in a public high school, Mr. Goodman also has come across immigrants and dreamers themselves, in the seats of his classroom.

Q: Have you ever had a dreamer, refugee or illegal immigrant in your class? If so did they ever come to you for help or advice? If not what would you do if they did?

A: I have had dreamers and illegal immigrants in my classes before, however, none of them ever came to me for help or advice. I'm pretty sure that many of them are afraid to make their immigration status

public. If any of them did ask me for help or advice I would probably connect them with a legal advocate for immigrants.

Q: What problems did you face while trying to help the student?

A: I think the biggest problems for illegal immigrants, refugees and dreamers are the continuously changing and complex laws, and enforcement of those laws and both a local and national level.

Q: You once taught in California which is home to more illegal immigrants than any other state. What, if any, differences do you notice between the attitudes that exist toward immigrants in Perry compared to in Pasadena?

A: Attitudes towards immigrants in California seem to be more welcoming than attitudes in Ohio. Because Californians have been dealing with these issues on a mass scale for so long, people's willingness to more quickly employ empathy seems to be the norm.

Q: Have you taught any immigrants who have made an impression on you? Describe him or her.

A: Every immigrant student that I've taught, whether legal or illegal, has made an impression on me. Many times I end up learning more from them than they do from me. Immigrants are an invaluable part of America, and especially our education system.

Lastly, Mr. Goodman was asked about the overall immigration system.

Q: What is your dream for immigrant children coming to the US?

A: My dream for immigrant children coming to the U.S. is for them all to feel not just welcomed, but loved. Diversity in our country needs to be embraced. Immigrants should be celebrated and never looked down upon as "less American".

Q: What is your take on the overall US immigration process?

A: I think that the U.S. immigration process has become too complex and confusing. Legal immigration takes too long. The application and approval process has too many people waiting on the sidelines. The opportunities offered by the American Dream should be expedited for those seeking better lives for themselves regardless of country of origin.

Q: Why do you think it has taken so long for the US government to pass meaningful immigration reform?

A: Change is hard. And people's views of immigration is constantly shifting from year to year. The government tends to move way too slow on in big issues like this.

Q: The division that exists over immigration seems is split along party lines. Do you foresee any specific immigration issues where the two side may be able to come together and compromise? If yes, which ones. If no, why not?

A: I do not see much compromise coming any time soon. Democrats and Republicans seem to becoming more and more polarized on immigration issues every day.