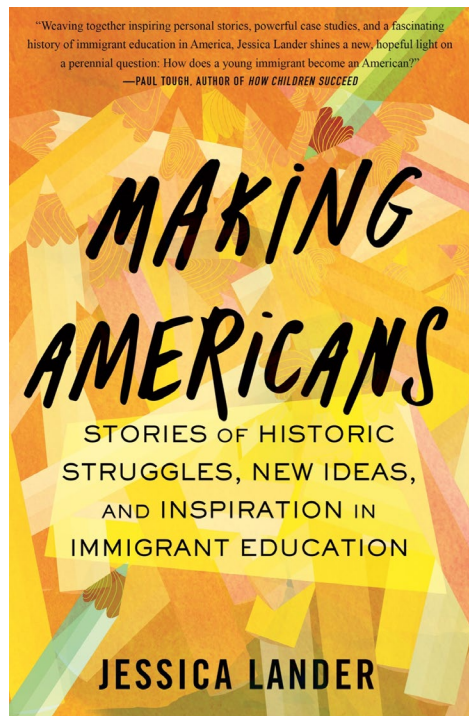


Reading Guide to *Making Americans*



A landmark work that weaves captivating stories about the past, present, and personal into an inspiring vision for how America can educate immigrant students.

Setting out from her classroom, Jessica Lander takes the reader on a powerful and urgent journey—told through captivating stories of the past, the present, and the personal—to understand what it takes for immigrant students to become Americans.

- She brings to life historic struggles to improve immigrant education—the Nebraska teacher arrested for teaching an eleven-year-old boy in German who took his case to the Supreme Court; the California families who overturned school segregation for Mexican American children; and the Texas families who risked deportation to establish the right for undocumented children to attend public schools.
- She visits innovative classrooms across the country—a school for refugee girls in Georgia; five schools in Aurora, Colorado, that created a community-wide network of organizations and people to support newcomer children; and a North Carolina district of more than one hundred schools that rethought how they teach their immigrant-origin students.
- She shares inspiring stories of her own students' immigrant journeys and how they created their own American identities—a boy who escaped Baghdad and found a home in his school's ROTC program, the daughter of Cambodian genocide survivors who dreamed of

becoming a computer scientist, and an orphan boy who escaped violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and created a new community here.

Together, the stories and insights chart a course for educators and policy makers—and for everyone who cares about America’s future.

Making Americans provides a clear vision for how schools can help nurture a sense of belonging in newcomers, with benefits for all students. It is a catalyst for communities across America to reimagine immigrant education.

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Jessica Lander is an award-winning teacher, writer, and author. She teaches history and civics to recent immigrant students in a Massachusetts public high school and has won numerous awards for her teaching, including being named a Top 50 Finalist for the Global Teacher Prize, presented by the Varkey Foundation. Jessica writes frequently about education policy and teaching. She is a coauthor of Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher’s Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success and the author of Driving Backwards.

Discussion Questions

General Questions

1. Lander writes that “belonging is fundamental” (pg. 8). What does *belonging* mean to you? In what ways does Lander argue that belonging is essential for immigrant students? In what ways does your own community nurture or fail to nurture a sense of belonging for young immigrants?
2. Lander presents eight essential elements of belonging (pg. 7). Choose one of these eight elements that speaks to you and describe why you think it is important for immigrant-origin students specifically, and for all students more generally. In what ways do you think schools and organizations can help nurture and ensure this element?
3. *Making Americans* explores “the tension between welcome and exclusion” in the United States. What are some of the US national and state policies and programs highlighted in the book that welcomed immigrants? What are some that sought to exclude immigrants? What policies and practices today welcome or exclude immigrants?
4. What different roles does *Making Americans* suggest schools can and should play in nurturing a sense of belonging in immigrant students?

5. In chapter 1, Lander shares part of her own migration journey, writing about her great-grandfather who arrived in the US as a seven-year-old refugee from what is now Ukraine. Why do you think she included part of her own family's migration story? Reflect on your own family's story of migration—this could be movement across a city, across a state, across the country, between countries. Was this migration by choice or by force? When and why did your family move? Did they feel welcome or excluded when they came to their new home? Who helped them build new communities?
6. In each chapter, there is one story from the past, the present, and the personal. Choosing one chapter, analyze the connections you see between the three stories in a chapter. How does each of these stories inform, deepen, and extend your understanding of the other two stories in a chapter?

Questions about the Past

1. Italian educator Leonard Covello reflected on his and other immigrant students' experiences learning in American schools in the early 1900s, when many educators had a narrow view of what it meant to be American. He wrote, "We were becoming Americans by learning how to be ashamed of our parents" (pg. 38). How have opinions and approaches to immigrant education changed over the last 150 years? Are there ways they seem to have stayed the same?
2. Lander writes about the Settlement House Movement in Chicago in chapter 2, in which Jane Addams helped create Hull House to provide comprehensive support for the surrounding immigrant community, including pushing against schools' tendencies to drive a wedge between immigrant students and their parents. Addams argued that schools and communities should recognize and value the many skills and strengths that immigrant families and children brought with them. How did Addams's model inform the present-day Aurora ACTION Zone program in Colorado, profiled in chapter 2? What other examples in the book highlight the strengths of immigrant parents?
3. Chapter 5 tells the story of US president Lyndon B. Johnson, who advocated for and signed into law key civil rights legislation, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In what ways did the passage of these laws lead to the profound reshaping of American classrooms?
4. In the eight stories of the past, Lander introduces us to a wide range of people who advocated on behalf of immigrant young people. Some were educators, but many were not. Who are some of these advocates, what were their professions, and what type of advocacy did they do? What lessons can be drawn from their work? What connections do you see with people in your community today and the advocacy work they do to support newcomers?
5. *Making Americans* explores key moments, laws, and cases that have transformed immigrant education over the last 150 years. Is there a historical story that you didn't know about before reading the book? What lessons can be drawn from that story and

piece of history? How does knowing that story of history inform how we understand the present?

Questions about the Present

1. Lander writes, “Students at Las Americas carry with them much more than backpacks” (pg. 36). What does she mean by this, and what else are students carrying? What are strategies that Las Americas uses to help students with these additional things they carry? In what ways can schools support students outside of academics, and why might this be important?
2. Mayra Hayes and her team in Guilford County, North Carolina, set out to help teachers reimagine literacy instruction at more than one hundred schools (chapter 5). What strategies, big and small, do they use to put this new approach into practice? More generally, what lessons can be drawn about how best to successfully implement ideas and approaches across an organization?
3. In what ways do ENLACE teachers’ personal stories and experiences help them understand their students’ families? How does that impact how they engage with parents and teach their students?
4. Reflect on the importance of “voice” and the importance of recognizing and valuing student voice. In what ways do educators at some of the seven schools profiled in the book value students’ voices?

Questions about the Personal

1. Choose two of the seven students profiled in the book. What were their expectations of the US and of US schools before they arrived, and how do those expectations line up with reality? What stands out to you about their first year in US schools? Who were important advocates for them, and what people, communities, or practices helped them begin to feel welcome?
2. As a high school student, Safiya (chapter 4) became a class leader when her class tackled an action civics project in their community. In this, and in many other of the stories of the personal, Lander’s students talk about engaging with their community. In what ways do these experiences affect them, particularly in how they see themselves? What is the role of civic education today in schools? What do you believe it should be?
3. What is gained by listening to the stories and experiences of the young people profiled in *Making Americans*?
4. Choose two of the seven students profiled in the book: identify the strengths they have and how those strengths help both them and their communities.