

**Hmong History & Cultural Studies Model Curriculum**  
**California Department of Education**  
**Contextualizing the Hmong Refugee Experience**  
**Grade(s): 11–12**

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**Area of Study:** Hmong Refugee Experiences

**Compelling Question:** How do Hmong communities experience displacement, refugee camps, and resettlement?

**Lesson Questions (Supporting Questions):**

- What is a Hmong refugee?
- How do social, political, and economic factors shape Hmong refugee experiences?
- How do legal definitions and policies impact Hmong refugee experiences?

**Lesson Materials:**

- **Supplies:**
  - Access to laptop device
  - Teacher slidedeck (optional)
  - Note-taking supplies (paper/pencil or GoogleDoc) for “Thoughts, Questions, Epiphany” activities
  - CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) final assessment activity
  - Project Zero Resources (templates)
    - *Reporter’s Notebook*
    - *Feelings and Options*
    - *Values, Identities, Actions*
- **Readings:**
  - Teacher Background Information (can be found in procedures)
  - Kansapedia Hmong Story Cloth webpage
  - “The TQE Method” from Cult of Pedagogy
  - “Interview with J. Kou Vang” (1–7) from Hmong Oral History Project
  - “Interview with Yaw Yang” from Hmong Oral History Project
- **Videos:**
  - *Former U.S. refugee coordinator talks about the Hmong in resettlement documents* on YouTube

- *Animation: A Hmong Refugee's Journey* on YouTube
- *Losing Everything: A Journey to Thailand and America* on YouTube
- *The impossible happens every day in the life of the refugee* | Kao Kalia Yang | TEDxMinneapolis on YouTube

**Lesson Objective:** Students will review the policies of refugee camps and resettlement and its impacts on the Hmong refugee experiences.

**Ethnic Studies Theme:**

This lesson connects to the ethnic studies theme of *power and oppression* from the Asian American Studies Curriculum Framework (Asian American Research Initiative, 2022). Students will consider war, migration and imperialism as contexts shaping citizenship and racialization. Students discuss US foreign policy impact on Southeast Asian migration to the United States and the intergenerational trauma within the Hmong community and successive generations.

For additional guidance around ethnic studies implementation, refer to the *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum* (2021) <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/esmc.asp>.

**Historical Thinking Skill:**

This lesson will facilitate student proficiency in *cause and consequence* one of Seixas' historical thinking skills (Seixas & Morton, 2013). To help students to understand that there are short-term and long-term consequences of events. Students will consider how change is driven by multiple causes, and results in multiple consequences. These create a complex web of interrelated short-term and long-term causes and consequences. Educators may enhance this lesson by discussing mental health but also focusing on healing practices as a response to coping with the trauma and making connections with present-day society.

**Standards Addressed:**

HSS-11.9 Students analyze U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11–12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11–12.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11–12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Lesson Assessment:**

Students will choose from one of the following options:

- Option A: Have students complete a well-developed CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) response to the questions: What are Hmong Refugee experiences?
- Option B: Students have the option of completing a Strategy Values, Identities, Actions reflection.

**Suggested Amount of Time:** 120 minutes

**Lesson Background:** This lesson is meant to follow students learning about the Secret War in Laos, including how Hmong people were displaced. After learning about the displacement of Hmong people, students will explore the impact of their refugee experiences.

Through primary/secondary sources, such as texts/media/images, students will learn about the immigration and refugee laws that have played a substantial role in the experiences of Southeast Asian (Hmong) refugees who came to the US through many different legal processes and procedures. Specifically focusing on Hmong American refugees, the legal pathways provided by US immigration laws have shaped their experiences. However, the geopolitical nature of certain laws played an important role in the decisions of who was classified as a refugee to be able to come to the US. Other laws and procedures classified refugees as immigrants, creating challenges for many who could not meet the criteria for citizenship or refugee status, abandoning family members in refugee camps in Thailand.

This lesson contains content that may be sensitive for some students. Teachers should exercise discretion in evaluating whether the resources are suitable for their class and provide a content warning to their students at the beginning of the lesson.

### **Lesson Procedures:**

Teachers can use the recommended text below to create a PPT or teachers may access the lesson slidedeck here and modify as needed:

<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/x0z4j6jji18fi68x0ry2jzrcrcjsxq6ly>.

### **Day One** (60 minutes)

Step 1: Display the full image of the Hmong story cloth from the Kansapedia Hmong Story Cloth webpage <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/hmong-story-cloth/10367>.

- Have students talk with a partner or table group to describe what they see.
- Debrief as a class and clarify any misunderstandings.

Next, display the zoomed-in portion of the story cloth depicting refugees crossing the river captioned “Hmong people fleeing across the Mekong River.”

Next, have them complete a See-Think-Wonder on a piece of paper.

- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What do you wonder?

Have the students discuss their responses with a neighbor or table group members and then debrief as a class.

Step 2: Review concepts central to the lesson: diaspora, immigrant, refugee, and refugee (CRSC re-definition). Check for understanding with students after you discuss their meaning. If time permits, have students create a vocabulary matrix for one of the terms.

*(Teacher background information from Ma Vang and Chia Youyee Vang, 2023):*

- **Diaspora**: dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland due to social, political and economic reasons
- **Refugee (UN)**: legal category defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention
  - Refugees experience forced migration due to fear of political persecution including war, religion, gender and sexual persecution. Additional causes of migration are due to climate change (especially for Pacific Islanders experiencing rising sea waters), earthquakes, and other environmental disasters.
  - Receiving legal recognition by the UN as a refugee means one is entitled to the legal protections of non-refoulement (cannot be forced to return to the country a person has fled and is still fearful for their life) and the opportunity to resettle in the country of refuge or a third country. The refugee protections also extend to those who are internally displaced within their country of residence.
  - While the refugee designation comes with important protections, not everyone who experiences forced migration gets to be a refugee. Because the 1951 Refugee Convention emerged out of Europe in the post-WWII era and pertained to European forced migrants, it excludes people who flee from economic disasters; gang violence; or other forms of oppression that may not be immediate such as colonialism or current forms of political unrest and military dictatorships that result from neoliberal global economic policies (i.e. North American Free Trade Agreement). Many who attempt to seek asylum from fear of gang violence and lack of job opportunities in their home countries are often deemed undocumented migrants.

- **Immigrant:** Our common knowledge about immigrants tends to focus on this group as voluntary migrants who are in search of economic opportunities. Immigrants chose to leave their home country to resettle in a new place. But, many immigrants leave their homes due to war and other forms of violence that are not recognized as refugee-producing circumstances.
- **Refugee (CRSC):**
  - Refugees and immigrants know that the distinctions between them are often false because immigrants also escape forms of persecution that have not been recognized by the UN. In addition, the legal protections for refugees are limited and many refugees face hardship in waiting for resettlement and in making a new life after resettlement. In fact, resettlement works to absolve state governments of military, economic, and other interventions that produce forced migration. Refugee migration is evidence that historical and political injustices have taken place, as reflected in the refrain that ‘we are here because you [the US] were there.’ Recognizing these realities, the Critical Refugee Studies Collective redefines the refugee in the following way to center refugee experiences and account for the many different causes of forced displacement: “Refugees are human beings forcibly displaced within or outside of their land of origin as a result of persecution, conflict, war, conquest, settler/colonialism, militarism, occupation, empire, and environmental and climate-related disasters, regardless of their legal status. Refugees can be self-identified and are often unrecognized within the limited definitions proffered by international and state laws” (criticalrefugeestudies.com).
  - This re-definition uplifts refugee humanity and agency because forced migrants do not have to wait for the UN or state governments to declare that they are refugees. Self-recognition allows refugees to tell their stories and demand protection as human beings even if they may live in precarious situations. Within this redefinition of the refugee, **stories** can operate as **refugee knowledge** because they are filled with histories and experiences that are not easily found in history books or classroom textbooks. Refugees are people who have been forced to move, fleeing with little possessions. Forced migration results in erasures of one’s history from the archives. It is through refugees telling their stories that opens a window into the contradictions of the law. **Refugee storytelling** speaks back to refugee law and media representations about them. Storytelling challenges the idea that refugees are their fear by demonstrating how they also live fearlessly.

Step 3: Review policies central to the lesson: 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, and the 1980 Refugee Act. Review the policies of refugee camps and resettlement. It would be helpful if students add these policies to their vocabulary matrix.

- Check for understanding with students after you discuss their meaning. Draw students' attention to the fact that originally the Status of Refugees, Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 did not include Hmong refugees due to the fact that their participation was a secret. Hmong refugees were included in the following year in 1976.

*(Teacher background information from Ma Vang and Chia Youyee Vang, 2023):*

***1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (open-access resource)***

In 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established. It is primarily responsible for the major care and protection of refugees. UN solutions to refugee situations include:

- Voluntary repatriation (going back of one's own free will) if and when possible;
- Monetary assistance to countries housing refugees; or
- Resettlement in a new country.

The definition of a refugee outlined in Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and modified by the 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of refugees is any person who:

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

***Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 (May 23, 1975)***

Following the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, US Congress passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 to provide assistance to "...aliens who (A) because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion, fled from Cambodia or Vietnam; (B) cannot return there because of fear of persecution on account of race, religion, or political opinion; and (C) are in urgent need of assistance for the essentials of life." Those fleeing Laos were added in 1976.

***Refugee Act of 1980***

In the post WWII era, responses to refugee crises were ad hoc. With the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, Congress set annual ceilings and established policies and procedures for refugee resettlement.

Step 4: Students will discuss how the policies impact Hmong refugees: How are Hmong people's resettlement shaped by these policies and how Hmong people are defined as refugees?

Step 5: Set the purpose for interacting with the next source and let students know that they will be viewing a video clip to answer the following question: Why was there a bias against the Hmong for resettlement after the Fall of Saigon?

- Play the YouTube video titled *Former U.S. refugee coordinator talks about the Hmong in resettlement documents* (2:50 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxbdLD0Ud6s>.
- Then, have the students discuss their responses to: *Why was there a bias against the Hmong for resettlement after the Fall of Saigon?* with a neighbor or table group members, and then debrief as a class.

### Day Two (60 minutes)

Step 1: Ask students to recall two new learnings from Day One's lesson. Provide a brief recap about Day One's content.

Step 2: Play the YouTube video titled *Animation: A Hmong refugee's journey* (2:45 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX-DHTuZvHE> and have students complete the Reporter's Notebook strategy <https://ucdavis.box.com/s/k8rttjg24nlrvvvyqusxwubwn4ygy1zc> on a piece of paper.

- Let the students know to make note of facts and evidence as they view. Have the students discuss with a partner or table group and complete the "Thoughts & Feelings and Make Your Best Judgment" portion of the Reporter's Notebook strategy after viewing the video.
- Debrief as a class and clarify any misunderstandings.

Step 3: Number students off from one through four. Students will then be assigned to examine a Hmong refugee oral history. For each oral history, have students take notes on each and complete a TQE strategy <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/tqe-method/> on a sheet of paper.

*Note to teachers: Have students preview the oral history testimonies for unknown words and review them prior to reading. Teachers may also wish to use a text leveler. In a TQE, students note their Thoughts, Questions, and Epiphanies.*

- Student 1: *Losing Everything: A Journey to Thailand and America* (9:01 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDWU5zP-B6g>
- Student 2: Read pages one through seven of the Refugee Oral History of J. Kou Vang <https://ucdavis.box.com/s/bmljif76u6bf79osbqdsvu9gb5y34fjm>

- Student 3: Read the Refugee Oral History of Yaw Yang  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/35ybto24j1rz4lnhu6fdlv5jt57ijng1>
- Student 4: The impossible happens every day in the life of the refugee | Kao Kalia Yang (13:41 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuYepsQ0fwM>

Step 4: Once students complete the TQE for their assigned oral history, have them share about the other oral histories by grouping up into fours. They should add to their own TQE notes about the other oral histories.

- Optional: If time permits, give students time and space to reflect and process their feelings on the oral histories. Have students complete the “Feeling and Options” strategy on a sheet of paper or as a talking point with peers (<https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/feelings-and-options>).
  - Feelings and Options  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/rr5yghqy7qbuilv96uzabhkh4byp8rmo>
  - Educator Guide  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/cof85e77b6fz56pk0cf0x5wkktgrwcn>
  - Student Handout  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/q3smu4zrldr4f56nqg2m9c7h2ex8f2u>

Step 5: Debrief the strategy as a class and correct any misunderstandings, help students process their feelings, and redirect/problematize any “Imagine” or “Say” response(s) (from the Feeling and Options strategy) that may not be in line with social justice standards/concepts.

### **Assessment/Closure:**

Students will choose either Option A or Option B for their assessment product:

- Assignment Option A: Have students complete a well-developed CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) response to the questions: What are Hmong Refugee experiences?

CER will utilize the following criteria:

- Student product contains a central thesis addressing the question, *What are Hmong Refugee experiences?*
- Student product includes a minimum of three details.
- Student product includes reasoning explaining how the evidence supports their claim.



- Student product includes reference to 1) How do social, political, and economic factors shape Hmong refugees? and 2) How do legal definitions and policies impact Hmong refugee experiences?
- Assignment Option B: Students also have the option of completing the strategy Values, Identities, Actions reflection (<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/b29m7rbsbc48x4ylkv9mtynpxarocr3>) that should address the criteria listed from the source.

### **Scaffolding:**

- **Engagement:** Consider the following method to support with lesson engagement:
  - Engage learners in assessment discussions of what constitutes excellence and generate relevant examples that connect to their cultural background and interests
  - Provide prompts that guide learners in when and how to ask peers and/or teachers for help
- **Representation:** Consider the following method to support with multiple means of representation:
  - Provide descriptions (text or spoken) for all images, graphics, video, or animations
  - Chunk information into smaller elements
- **Action and Expression:** Consider the following method to support in presenting their learning in multiple ways:
  - Provide sentence starters or sentence strips

For additional ideas to support your students, check out the UDL Guidelines at CAST (2018) <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

### **Multilingual Learner Supports:**

- **Emerging:** Consider the following method to support with emerging students:
  - Writing: Teach note taking on a graphic organizer
    - Students use a Frayer graphic organizer to support understanding of a key word or concept. Place the target word in the center amid four surrounding quadrants to support different facets of word meaning.
- **Expanding:** Consider the following method to support with expanding students:
  - Writing: Require learning logs for summaries of learning

- In a shared or interactive writing format, chart out characters, setting, problem, and events (including orientation, complication, and resolution). Add theme, as appropriate.
- **Bridging:** Consider the following method to support with bridging students:
  - Writing: Require academic writing and the use of target academic vocabulary
    - Apply domain-specific vocabulary and general Academic vocabulary in open sentence frames to perform functions, like describing or explaining, that target specific grammatical structures.

For additional guidance around scaffolding for multilingual learners, please consult the following resources:

- *English Learner Toolkit of Strategies*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/ujkdc2xp1dqjzrlq55czph50c3sq1ngu>
- *Providing Appropriate Scaffolding*  
<https://www.sdcoe.net/educators/multilingual-education-and-global-achievement/oracy-to-olkit/providing-appropriate-scaffolding#scaffolding>
- *Strategies for ELD*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/dcp15ymah51uwizpmmt2vys5zr2r5reu>
- *ELA / ELD Framework*  
<https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/resources/6537/ela-eld-framework>
- *California ELD Standards*  
<https://ucdavis.box.com/s/vqn43cd632z22p8mfzn2h7pntc71kb02>

### Enrichment Opportunities:

1. Provide students with an extension choice board where they create a Hmong PSA, explore Hmong refugees and Ukrainian refugees, then create a Venn diagram of the refugee programs, or advocate for a school board or city resolution acknowledging the Hmong sacrifice and experience. (Teacher note: Teachers may wish to read about the Armenian Genocide Commemoration resolution for background information and/or share the information with their students as an exemplar of civic action  
[https://anca.org/press-release/gusd-board-of-education-unanimously-passes-resolution-designating-april-2015-as-month-of-commemoraion-of-the-centennial-anniversary-of-the-armenian-genocide/.](https://anca.org/press-release/gusd-board-of-education-unanimously-passes-resolution-designating-april-2015-as-month-of-commemoraion-of-the-centennial-anniversary-of-the-armenian-genocide/))
2. Alternatively, you may wish to select one option for your students and/or have students work collaboratively in pairs or groups. Create a single-point rubric using the following criteria:
  - Student(s) included conflict(s) background information
  - Student(s) included conflict(s) refugee journey narratives

- Student(s) included conflict(s) impacts on refugees
- Venn diagram includes similarities OR students include a well-developed and clear call to action product if completing a PSA or resolution proposal.

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