



BECOMING AMERICAN

NEW IMMIGRATION STORIES



CHILDREN'S READING LIST

Reading List Selected by Maria Salvadore

Younger Readers (Preschool to Grade 2)

America, My New Home by Monica Gunning. Illustrated by Ken Condon. Boyds Mill, 2004. Short poems reveal a child's wonder and her confusion when she moves from Jamaica to the United States. Soft illustrations depict lively urban scenes as the narrator travels, thinking and comparing them to her previous life in the Caribbean.

Apple Pie Fourth of July by Janet Wong. Illustrated by Margaret Chodos-Irvine. Harcourt, 2002. A young girl discovers that the Chinese food made in her family's store is fine, even on the day of a most American celebration. Bold illustrations capture the child's changing emotions and create a contemporary story.

Goldfish & Chrysanthemums by Andrea Cheng. Illustrated by Michelle Chang. Lee & Low, 2003. When Nancy's grandmother learns that her ancestral home in Suzhou (China) is to be torn down, the girl and her brother recreate a bit of it in the backyard of their brownstone. Richly colored illustrations warmly depict the small fishpond surrounded by flowers.

Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia paintings and stories by Carmen Lomas Garza. Children's Book Press, c1990, 2005. A prominent Mexican-American artist creates a visual memoir of family and cultural traditions in south Texas. Vibrant paintings and vignettes in English and Spanish evoke pride in her heritage despite hardships encountered.

Faraway Home by Jane Kurtz. Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. Harcourt, 2000. Desta worries that her father will forget America when he returns to his native Ethiopia to visit his seriously ill mother. Universal concerns and a look at the essence of home are examined in this gently told and handsomely illustrated book.

Henry and the Kite Dragon by Bruce Edward Hale. Illustrated by William Low. Philomel, 2004. Henry and the other Chinese boys tangle with the Italian boys in their New York City neighborhood. Compromise is possible when they learn that Mr. Chin's kites frighten pigeons kept by the Italians. Dramatic paintings evoke the 1920s setting.

Henry Moon's First Full Moon by Lenore Look. Illustrated by Yumi Heo. Atheneum/Anne Schwartz, 2001. Jenny does not think her brother deserves the fuss of celebrating his one month birthday as is the Chinese custom. Her enthusiasm grows as she narrates the preparations and even decides that Henry is not such a bad little brother. Child-like illustrations add to the authentic narration.

I Love Saturdays/y Domingos by Alma Flor Ada. Simon & Schuster, 2002. A child enjoys two sets of grandparents each with a different background; one European American, the other Mexican American. Traditions and activities from both are integrated into the narration and the ingenuous illustrations which affirm the universality of love.

In the Small Small Night by Jane Kurtz. Illustrated by Rachel Isadora. Amistad/HarperCollins, 2005. When Abena's little brother can't sleep, she tells him stories from their native Ghana to assure Kofi that those who are smaller and seemingly weaker can overcome huge obstacles. Illustrations in soft pastels reflect the warmth between the children as well as differentiate the stories within the story.

Marianthe's Story: Painted Words & Marianthe's Story: Spoken Memories by Aiki. Greenwillow, 1998. This two-part picture book reveals how and why Marianthe immigrates to the United States, adjusts to school, makes friends, and learns to communicate. Evocative illustrations in an unusual format allow the universality of one child's story to unfold without specifying a home country.

Mice and Beans by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Illustrated by Joe Cepeda. Scholastic, 2001. Rosa Maria spends an entire week preparing for her granddaughter's birthday fiesta, getting help from an unexpected source. The fun and festivities unfold in the cadence of a folktale and lively illustrations serve as a reminder that parties and family fun are universal.

My Name is Yoon by Helen Recorvits. Illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska. FSG, 2003. A simple narration and almost surreal paintings capture the feeling of displacement as Yoon grieves leaving Korea and her gradual adjustment to her new home in America. As her fears and concerns lessen, the illustrations become more lighthearted.

Nadia's Hands by Karen English. Illustrated by Jonathan Weiner. Boyds Mill, 1999. Nadia, a Pakistani-American, is the flower girl in her aunt's traditional wedding but worries that she'll be teased in school about the customary designs created on her hands with indelible henna paste (mehndi). Nadia's ambivalent feelings and ultimate sense of pride is enhanced by brightly colored illustrations.

Peppe the Lamplighter by Elisa Barton. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. HarperCollins, 1993. Peppe and his family live in a tenement in New York's Little Italy with many other immigrants. Peppe strives to gain his father's approval as a lamplighter as he feels he holds a "small flame of promise for the future." Immigrant life in the early 20th century is vivified by luminous, detailed watercolors and flowing text.

Silent Movie by Avi. Illustrated by C.B. Mordan. Atheneum/Anne Schwartz, 2003. Gustave and his mother join Papa in the United States, encounter several disasters, but ultimately make it big. The drama unfolds in the style of a silent black/white movie and combines with a myth of early 20th century European immigration. The result is a rollicking good tale and an introduction to a period and its movies.

Three Cheers for Catherine the Great by Cari Best. Illustrated by Giselle Potter. DK, 1999. Sara and the neighbors who live in their apartment building figure out how to share gifts but no presents for Grandma Catherine's birthday celebration. The Russia from which Catherine immigrated blends into contemporary urban life quite naturally in the resulting festivities.

Middle Readers (Grades 3 through 5)

Escaping to America: A True Story by Rosalyn Schanzer. HarperCollins, 2000. Vivid illustrations and compelling narrative recount the story of how and why the author's grandparents left Poland to come to America in 1921. War was on the horizon in their town, the persecution of Jews had started. In this timeless tale, hope and happiness were possible in America,

Grandfather's Journey by Allen Say. Houghton Mifflin, 1993. The narrator describes his grandfather's journey from Japan to America and back again and the duality it creates. Luminous watercolors and understated text create powerful images of being a part of two cultures noting that "the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other."

Granny Torrelli Makes Soup by Sharon Creech. HarperCollins, 2003. Wisdom and insight emerge from Granny Torrelli's kitchen to nourish her granddaughter Rosie and Rosie's best friend Bailey. The stories Granny tells are as important as the ingredients in her traditional Italian recipes to cook up a flavorful story about family, friendship and growing up.

Jakarta Missing by Jane Kurtz. Greenwillow, 2001. Twelve-year old Dakar, born and raised in Africa, misses her sister, Jakarta, who decides to stay in Kenya when the family moves "home" to North Dakota. Dakar's love of books somewhat eases the difficulty of adjusting to a new country though the same is not true for Jakarta.

Hannah's Journal: The Story of an Immigrant Girl by Marissa Moss. Silver Whistle Books, 2000. Hannah chronicles her 1901 journey from Lithuania with her older cousin aboard a ship bound for New York. Though Lithuania has become increasingly dangerous for Russian Jews; the girls' detention on Ellis Island is equally frightening. The story was inspired by the author's family stories and made to look like a 10-year old child's journal.

House of Tailors by Patricia Giff Reilly. Wendy Lamb/Random House, 2004. Dina, a 13-year old girl who immigrated to Brooklyn from Germany, has entered another house of tailors, the work her uncle and his family does to go beyond their tenement life. Characters and life in New York in the late 19th century are vividly realized in this moving novel.

How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay by Julia Alvarez. Knopf, 2001. After his parent's divorce, Miguel must adjust to life away from New York City in Vermont and to his flamboyant aunt who comes from the Dominican Republic. He comes to appreciate Tia Lola's outlook and his own background.

Molly's Pilgrim by Barbara Cohen. Illustrated by Daniel Duffy. HarperCollins, 1998 (rev. ed.). Not only is Molly a new student, she speaks with a Yiddish accent and so is teased by the other kids in class. In spite of Molly's fears when her mother makes a doll that looks like a Russian immigrant, her classmates learn that it takes all kinds of "Pilgrims to make a Thanksgiving." This moving story is based on one from the author's own family.

My Chinatown: One Year In Poems by Kam Mak. HarperCollins, 2001. Poems in free verse and photo-realistic paintings are arranged by season to document a child's gradual adjustment to life in a new life in New York's Chinatown. Though he continues to miss Hong Kong, the child comes to appreciate his new home.

Ruby Lu, Brave & True by Lenore Look. Illustrated by Anne Wilsdorf. Atheneum/Anne Schwartz, 2004. Eight-year old Ruby Lu loves her baby brother, Oscar, but hates Chinese school on Saturdays. Each short, humorous, episodic chapter lets readers empathize with the downs -- but mostly ups -- in Ruby Lu's life on 20th Avenue South. This contemporary novel is animated and engaging just like Ruby Lu.

When Jessie Came Across the Sea by Amy Hest. Illustrated by P.J. Lynch. Candlewick, 1997. At the turn of the 20th century, thirteen year old Jessie leaves her beloved grandmother and her Eastern European shtetel to travel to "the promised land," befriending Lou, a young shoemaker, on the voyage. Dramatic paintings depict the voyage, Jessie's work in New York, a chance meeting with Lou and the ultimate reunion with her grandmother.

Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear by Lensey Namioka. Illustrated by Kees deKeifter. Doubleday, 1992. The Yang family has recently moved from Shanghai to Seattle. Yingtao, the youngest of the four Yang children, is the only one with no musical talent, placing the Yang family string quartet in danger. With verve and perception, cultural and familial expectations are explored in this humorous, engaging story.

Older Readers (Grades 6 – 8)

Becoming Naomi Leon by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Scholastic, 2004. Naomi Leon and her little brother live with their much-loved grandmother. In order to avoid moving in with their deadbeat mother, the children and Gram travel to Mexico to find the children's father and discover their rich cultural and artistic background.

Child of the Owl: Golden Mountain Chronicles, 1965 by Laurence Yep. HarperCollins, 1977. Casey moves to San Francisco's Chinatown to live with her grandmother when her gambler father is down on his luck. Likeable and streetwise, Casey comes to know and appreciate her grandmother, her own heritage, and life in this vibrant (though initially foreign to Casey) place.

The Circuit: Stories from the life of a Migrant Child by Francisco Jimenez. Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Based on the author's life, this series of simply but poignantly told short stories chronicle a family's journey from a small Mexican village to California. As the family grows, they follow the backbreaking harvesting circuit.

Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Blue Sky Press/Scholastic, 2000. Esperanza's privileged life on her family's ranch in Mexico is shattered by sudden tragedy. She must deal with a new life in a camp for Mexican farm workers in California, strongly affected by the Great Depression of the early 20th century. Esperanza grows into her new life but retains essential elements from her past.

Kira Kira by Cynthia Kadohata. Atheneum, 2004. Set in the 1950s, life is difficult for Katie and her family in rural Georgia where her parents work in the chicken processing plant. It's tough not only because of lingering prejudice toward Japanese, but because Katie's much-loved sister, Lynn, is dying from cancer. Characters and setting combine to create a memorable, sophisticated novel.

Habibi by Naomi Shihab Nye. Simon & Schuster, 1997. Liyana is 14 years old when she and her family return to Jerusalem, her father's home country. American born but of Palestinian descent, Liyana witnesses the conflict between Arabs and Israelis and feels it firsthand when she falls in love with Owen, a Jewish boy.

Letters from Rifka by Karen Hesse. Holt, 1992. Letters to a cousin reveal Rifka's difficult journey to escape the brutal treatment of Jews in the Russia of 1919, her separation from her family, detainment on Ellis Island and ultimate reunion. Inspired by a family member's story, the characters and their experiences create a compelling novel.

Maya Running by Anjali Banerjee. Wendy Lamb Books/Random House, 2005. While dealing with typical adolescent issues, Maya comes to appreciate her heritage when a cousin visits from India. And with a little help from the Hindu god, Ganesh, she is prepared for the next move from Canada to the west coast of California. Fantasy is interwoven into this contemporary feeling novel (though it takes place in the 1970s).

Memories of Sun by Jane Kurtz. HarperCollins, 2004. How it feels to be part of two countries, two cultures, two mindsets is revealed in poetry and short stories by a range of writers. This sensitive collection set in countries across Africa and various places in the United States, reveals that regardless of the continent, each of us live under the same sun.

The Old African by Julius Lester. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. Dial, 2005. Elements of folklore and fantasy combine in this stunning novella of forced immigration. Realistic watercolors and lyrical text combine to chronicle the life and power of the Old African who survives the passage, the oppression of slavery and ultimately leads his people back across the "water-that-stretches-forever" to their native land.

Seedfolk by Paul Fleischman. HarperCollins, 1997. The attempt by one young Vietnamese girl to beautify her blighted urban neighborhood results in a community coming together to build something more lasting.

Unique voices of immigrants from many countries effectively reveal how an individual can set in motion a change of events to bring about positive change.

Step from Heaven by An Na. Front Street, 2001. When Oh is four, she leaves her home and her beloved grandmother in Korea to come to America. Her voice matures as she grows into a mature young woman, poignantly chronicling her experiences in her new home in California in a difficult family situation.