Lesson Plan: Assimilation or Acculturation?

OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students will watch and interpret a series of video clips that depict the journey of a young Chinese girl after a family in New York adopts her. Students will discuss how the terms “assimilation” and “acculturation” apply to the girl’s situation as she transitions to her new life in the United States. Students will then consider more broadly how much they think immigrants should maintain or let go of their cultures when they move to the United States. For background information on adoption from China and the concepts of assimilation and acculturation, see the Resources section of this lesson plan.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcasts. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
Students will:

- Make observations about how a young Chinese girl adapts to her new life in the United States after an American family adopts her.
- Determine if she assimilates or acculturates when she moves to the United States.
- Form an opinion about whether assimilation or acculturation by immigrants is in the best interest of the United States.
- Explain their reasoning on this issue in an opinion paper.

GRADE LEVELS
9-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Psychology, Sociology, Social Studies, Current Events

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video clips
- Handout: Viewing Guide (PDF file)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, plus homework time if needed

FILM
Clip 1: “Introducing the Sadowskys” (length: 3:20)
The clip begins at 2:12 with children playing in the snow. It ends at 5:32 with the spoken words “. . . the rest of everybody else’s until she comes home, right?”

Clip 2: “Meeting the Foster Family” (length: 1:56)
The clip begins at 23:00 with the line “Sui Yong was our first foster child.” It ends at 24:56 when a picture is taken.

Clip 3: “Internet Call With the Foster Family” (length: 6:41)
The clip begins at 1:02:15 with the line “Okay, my name is Faith.” It ends at 1:08:56 when the interpreter says, “Foreigners are very nice people.”

Clip 4: “Remembering the First Meeting” (length 0:13)
The clip begins at 1:12:12 with the spoken words “In China, I didn’t know.” It ends at 1:12:27 with the line “. . . because I don’t know them.”

Clip 5: “More Chinese or More American?” (length: 0:36)
The clip begins at 1:14:07 with the question “Do you like learning Chinese?” It ends at 1:14:43 when she answers, “American.”

**ACTIVITY**
1. Ask students to imagine that they are 8-year-olds and are going to be adopted by families in China. Have them write for five minutes or so on how they think their lives might change once they move to China.

2. Invite students to share their responses. Write on the board some of the changes they mention. Why would these things change? Then, ask students what would not change and list those. Have students explain their thinking.

3. Distribute the Viewing Guide. Explain that you are going to show the class a series of video clips that document what happened when a family in New York adopted an 8-year-old girl from China and introduced her to life in the United States.

4. Guide the class through the video clips and the questions on the handout.

5. Invite students to consider their own backgrounds and think about how much their families and/or ancestors have preserved or let go of their cultural heritages. Give students a few minutes to discuss this topic with partners and then allow a few students to share their thoughts with the class.

6. Ask students to think more broadly about immigrants in the United States. How important do they think it is for immigrants to preserve their cultures when they move to the United States? Do students think that immigrants should assimilate or acculturate? Which process do they believe is in the best interest of the
country? Students should take a stand on this issue and write opinion papers that explain their reasoning.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS
Students can be assessed on:
- Thoughtful and complete responses on the Viewing Guide.
- Clear arguments provided in their opinion papers.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS
- Explore POV’s other documentary stories of intercultural adoption, including *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, *First Person Plural*, *Discovering Dominga*, and *Off and Running*. Each film has website resources and a lesson plan to facilitate classroom use.
- Determine community attitudes towards immigrants. Have the class develop a survey designed to measure to what degree your local community thinks immigrants should change when they come to the United States. Have students administer the survey to members of your community and analyze the resulting data. Then, connect attitudes in your community to current political topics affecting immigrants. Predict how likely your community would be to vote for or against issues related to immigration. Use an upcoming or past election to compare predictions with voting results.
- Read Chinese adoption stories from multiple perspectives. ComeUnity.com provides a book list [http://www.comeunity.com/adoption/books/0china-children.html] with summaries that describe the points of view on Chinese adoption in each book. Have student groups write plays that dramatize what they have read in one or more of these books (or others that you prefer).

RESOURCES
This article defines these terms and provides some discussion about the behavior of Asian Americans.

The website for this Bill Moyers special provides first-person accounts of the Chinese-American experience, a timeline of the impact of Chinese immigrants in the United States, an online quiz and more.

Adoptive Families. “China Adoption.”
http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/china_adoption.php

Adoptive Families magazine provides information and statistics on U.S. adoptions from China and provides links to related articles and books.

STANDARDS
These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 3: Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance and physical development affect human behavior.

Civics, Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Standard 1: Understands the family as the basic unit of society.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Standard 2: Understands the impact of the family on the well-being of individuals and society.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Standard 10: Understands how knowledge and skills related to child development affect the well-being of individuals, families and society.

Geography, Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 5: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Working With Others, Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.