Crossing Borders and Crossing Time:  
A Tableau of African Immigration and Migration in America

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Abstract:

This curriculum unit will examine transformations and journeys, both external (immigrants) and internal (migrants) from the African Diaspora to America. Students will learn that Africa is a continent comprised of 54 countries, hundreds of tribes, cultures, languages, and cultural traditions. In other words, Africans are not homogenous and that my African-American students sit in class and live amongst African students from various African countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Senegal. Students will also learn that until recently people of African descent have not been counted as part of America’s migratory tradition. The Transatlantic Slave Trade has created an indelible image of African men and women, children as transported chattel and is considered the most defining element in the arrival of Africans to America. However, the journey to America’s shores is only the first wave of immigration experienced by Africans in the Diaspora. A series of migrations would occur before African-Americans would truly consider themselves home.

This unit is designed for secondary students who are studying texts in English class that explore themes of journeys, migration, immigration, or coming-of-age stories. There is a strong emphasis on texts that cross-reference and incorporate World History, oral history, and African-American History in the English II curriculum. Therefore, lessons will focus primarily on reading historical fiction, fiction, researching primary and secondary records, conducting oral histories through interviews with African student immigrants to record their strong presence in West and Southwest Philadelphia. Memoirs, autobiographies, and newspaper articles will serve as the primary texts to introduce students to the African-American migratory experiences. Additionally, maps, surveys, census data, vital statistics records, and photographs/films will be utilized to help students dismantle borders that have prevented them from connecting to their immigrant classmates.