

# Portrayals of Immigrants in Television and Film

Portrayals of immigrants and the immigrant experience are frequent themes in television and film.

A **portrayal** is how an individual or group is presented in media, but such representations may or may not be factually accurate. Sometimes these representations offer an idealized view of the immigrant experience. While the Statue of Liberty portrays a nation welcoming newcomers, the reality is that the United States was and is not a land of opportunity for many who come here.



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-Equ>

In other instances, immigrants may be presented in harmfully stereotypical terms, often as criminals or threats. In the report [Change the Narrative, Change the World: How Immigrant Representation on Television Moves Audiences to Action](#), researchers from the University of Southern California found viewers who saw programs with more inclusive immigration storylines had more welcoming, supportive attitudes toward immigrants than those who did not.

In these activities, you will explore whether current portrayals and representations of immigrants in television and film media are accurate or stereotypical, and while so doing, consider: "What does media representation of immigrants mean to immigrants?"

## Activity 1: Write a Letter of Praise or Protest (Persuasive Writing)

- Pick a present-day (within the last 5 years) TV program, film, podcast, or other media content that includes representation of immigrants.\*
  - Use the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Movies](#) or [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Television](#) to critically evaluate the media.
- Decide whether you'd like to PRAISE it or PROTEST the media based on how it presents immigrants.
- Look up the producer of the content and write them a letter.
  - **PRAISE:** If you feel immigrants are portrayed accurately and authentically, explain why and express your appreciation.
  - **PROTEST:** If you feel immigrants are portrayed inaccurately and/or stereotypically, explain why and express your lack of appreciation. You can also make suggestions for changes and improvement.

\*If students select *Master of None*, consider also exploring the media portrayal and personality of Aziz Ansari.

## Activity 2: Evaluate Representation of Immigrants in the Movies

- Use this [list of YouTube clips](#) of movies from the website [Digital History](#) to evaluate how immigrants have been portrayed in films throughout history.
  - What are the differences in immigrant portrayals between mainstream Hollywood films (e.g., *The Godfather*) and movies from less well-known studios and

- directors?
- How do the images of immigrants relate to the social and cultural contexts of the time period when the film was made?
- How do movies from the 1950s or 1960s differ in their portrayal of immigrants compared to more recent films?
- **Create a video** in which you respond to the previous prompts and critically evaluate the representation of immigrants in movies throughout history.

## Additional Resources

- [TV and Film Have Mixed Portrayals of Immigrants](#)
- [How the News Media Portray Latinos in Stories and Images](#)
- [Immigration and Democracy Podcast Series](#)

## Connecting to the eBook

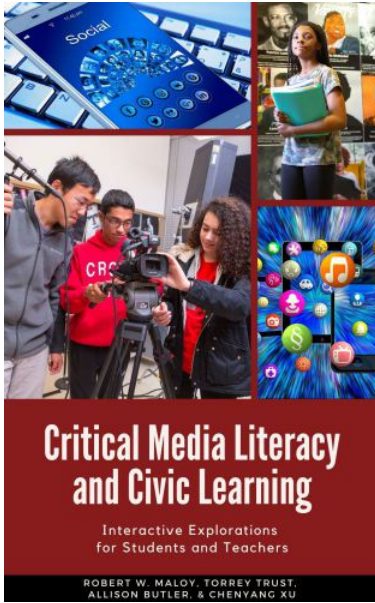
[\*Building Democracy for All: Representing Immigration\*](#)

## Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens as compared to non-citizens. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.2]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and

tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.

- 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
- 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8



Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. EdTech Books.  
<https://edtechbooks.org/mediaandciviclearning>