



Passages to Canada: A Modern Day Look

In the previous lesson, *Trans-Atlantic Passage: The People and the Pain*, a detailed lesson outline was provided. It illustrated ways to teach what life was like for slaves who had to travel to the Americas, under dreadful conditions.

This section, titled Passages to Canada, looks at life for immigrants to Canada, as they traveled here from their home country. Like their African slave counterparts some 250 years earlier, many of these newcomers to Canada came under unique circumstances. It is left to the teacher to decide how best to use these narratives in the context of either comparing these stories to that of Black slaves, or whether to simply analyze them on their own.

The first three narratives are short, personal stories that tell the tales of three immigrants of colour, to Canada. These immigrants, Dr. Godwin Eni, Emmanuel Chinyeaka Okoli, and Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, talk of the need to come to Canada, the struggles they faced, and what Canada means to them.

Suggested activities:

- Present each case and then comparing and contrasting each immigrant's story.
- Students can create a personal time line for each story, along with a summary of the basic forces that have affected the immigrant's life.
- Students can write about what life was like for the immigrant, in their home life. Some research may be necessary.
- Students can dramatize the life of the immigrant, emphasizing decision making aspects and conflict resolutions skills, as exemplified by each immigrant.
- Students can draw/paint/sketch, scenes depicting the travels of each immigrant.
- Students can use maps and atlases to calculate distances traveled by each immigrant, the route they took and natural and man-made obstacles on route to their new home.



The last two narratives, Dany Leferriere and Ken Wiwa offer accounts of coming to Canada from Africa. Like their Africa counterparts some 250 years ago, their stories are filled with concerning issues.

- Teachers can use some or all of the suggested activities listed above, and/or can use the Critical Thinking and Web Projects....See www.passagestocanada.com for:
 - The Challenges to Immigration sheet that offers 8 activities.
 - Teachers can also discuss the qualifications immigrants now need to become Canadian citizens and have students attempt the Citizenship test.
 - Students can also use different scenarios to determine immigration eligibility through the Immigration Ranking System.

Ultimately, the Passages to Canada section can be modified to suit students' needs and can be adapted to accommodate all learners including ESL, level 1 to 4 students, Gifted and Special Needs students.

Passages to Canada

Based on www.passagestocanada.com

Dr. Godwin Eni



I'm Dr. Godwin Eni. I am from Nigeria... from the eastern part of Nigeria. I belong to the Ibo tribe, which is the third largest ethnic community in Nigeria.

I came to Canada because of the trauma that I encountered during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. I was completing my studies at the university during the war, and Ibos were being killed in the streets, and war was declared against the members of the Ibo tribe in eastern Nigeria. And eastern Nigeria seceded and called itself Biafra. So during the war, it was a very traumatic experience for Ibos who were living outside of Ibo land. I was unable to return to eastern Nigeria, and many Ibo professors and students had find a way to save themselves, so we escaped into the bush, and lived in the bush for a very long time.

En route from Heathrow airport to Montreal, we were given a certificate. It was the fiftieth anniversary of Canada. And each passenger was given a certificate in commemoration of that date – October nine, I believe, eight or nine, 1970 – as we were flying over the Atlantic. I still have the certificate with me.



Then, shortly before we arrived in Montreal, I was told... I mean, the pilot announced that there was a riot, and that the British Trade Commissioner by the name of James Cross has been kidnapped, and that there were soldiers at the airport trying to prevent some separatist groups from leaving the country. I was traumatized by this news because I thought Canada was a... Canada was a peaceful, quiet, neutral country. I was surprised to hear about this, so I was quite afraid. I thought there was a war going on in Canada. In fact, I wished I could go back to Nigeria and be killed in Nigeria, than to be killed in Canada, because I didn't know anyone, and I didn't have any relatives, or any acquaintances. So when I arrived at Mirabel – I believe it was Mirabel airport then, international airport – I refused to leave the airport, because when I looked out through the window outside, I saw a military tank rolling across! And I was quite afraid.

After a different period, I summoned the courage to get into a taxi, and I told the taxi to take me to the nearest hotel. He took me to a hotel, which was a short distance, I believe. I had only fifty pounds in my pocket, so I gave it to the taxi driver, and I asked him to keep the change, (laughing) because I didn't know about Canadian money or the value of fifty pounds. I was only too anxious to get into a building where I can protect myself.

Emmanuel Chinyeaka Okoli



My name is Emmanuel Chinyeaka Okoli. My middle name, Chinyeaka, is "May God Help Us," a beautiful name. I'm originally from Nigeria – Nigeria on the west coast of Africa, and it's the most populous black nation in the whole world, with almost 136 million people.

I came to Canada for my Masters program for studies, and having finished the program I saw the cultural setup of Canada, and a lot of potential. And so I decided to stay, and now I'm a citizen of Canada.

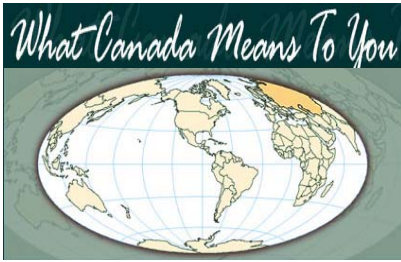
It wasn't very easy for the fact that I was in my thirties when I came, and most of my cultural roots were so deep into me. So coming at that later age to adjust was a little bit tough and difficult for me. The philosophy with my people is that wherever you find human beings existing, just watch, study and follow, and you will adapt. So I tried to adjust to the Canadian environment.

The areas that I had problems mostly were in terms of language and communication - things having to do with accent. So even though I taught English language to university students and people like that, when I came here it was difficult communicating with people freely. At times, they don't understand me and I have to repeat myself several times. And it's kind of a little bit depressing, frustrating – but in the end you begin to adjust gradually, with patience and a little bit of effort. Talking slowly, and trying to let people understand what you're saying. I took it in good faith, knowing that no person is deliberately wanting to punish you, just you trying to adjust.



I have not been to too many parts of the world, but from my deep and extensive study, I've found Canada as one of the best culturally. I feel that it's the capital of multiculturalism of the whole world. Because there's this openness to allow people to celebrate their culture, while at the same time holding on to the real Canadian culture. So ever since I came, I've had the opportunity and I've been given the chance to try to show those good aspects of African culture that I feel that can help and enhance the Canadian cultural mosaic.

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh



My name is Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, and I moved to Toronto in August 1967. I came with my family, which included my mother, my father, my brother and a sister. The five of us moved here in part because our parents wanted us to attend university in Canada. We moved from Trinidad and Tobago, and although there are very good schools there, I think that they thought that travel and living overseas would be a very good thing for us to do.

When I moved to Toronto in 1967, I attended one year of high school and then entered the University of Toronto, where I became very involved in a range of student activities, in addition to going to school, of course. And I became very involved in student government as one area of activity. That is the student administrative council, as well as various course union programs, because at that point in time in 1968 onwards, there was a move afoot to change the curriculum of the University of Toronto towards a more integrated, interdepartmental approach to curriculum, rather than very rigid programs of study. And then I became very involved in advocating and working towards establishing a feminist studies program.



Having spent quite a bit of time at the University of Toronto – I did graduate study there as well in child psychology, child development, sociology, and have graduate degrees from the University of Toronto in a number of disciplines. Somewhere in the middle of that process, it was in the early ‘70s – and this connects to the work I’m doing now – I worked for about a year and half with the Toronto school board, and in particular, I worked with a group of school trustees who were working on rewriting school board curriculum and programs to address the issues and the barriers faced by immigrant families with the Toronto school system, and to really try to work towards achieving a multicultural ideal in our school system. That program really had the effect of going a long way towards involving parents – parents from various ethnic backgrounds, racial backgrounds – in the school system, through the establishment of the School Community Relations Department.

As well as looking at curriculum, which incorporated and included the heritage of students who were in the school system, because in the early ‘70s, it was noted that a significant portion of the school population came from homes where English was not the first language, or did not come from Anglo-British heritage.

The work that I currently do is at the City of Toronto, and I work in the Diversity Management office, and the purpose of this office is to really work towards removing barriers to access and equity for the population of the city of Toronto. That means that we work with city departments to make sure that our programs and services are sensitive to the needs of our population. We carry out advocacy work on issues around immigration policy, for example. We address issues related to race relations and hate activity, and will carry out public education programs on a number of diversity-related themes. One of the areas that is really important in our work is that we provide resources to community organizations – community-based organizations – to build their capacity, and therefore to make it easier for members of their communities to become more integrated into our city. One of the things that I’m responsible for is administering an access and equity grants program.

We work, again, to recognize the contributions made by members of the public towards having a city that is more inclusive, and one of the things that we do as well is to implement an awards program, where volunteers within the community are recognized by city council for the efforts that they make regarding a range of human rights issues.

So that gives a broad overview of how I continue to work with immigrants in this city, and people who come from immigrant backgrounds. At this point in time, nearly half the city's population is an immigrant, and just over forty percent of the city's population comes from a racial minority background, and I think that all of these efforts work towards making Toronto one of the best cities in the world to live in.

Canadian Symbols

The Arms of Canada



The Canadian Flag



The Beaver

The Royal Union Flag



The Maple Leaf

Dany Laferrière One-Way Ticket



Dany Laferrière

Dany Laferrière was born in the village of Petit-Goâve, Haiti, in 1953. For decades Haiti suffered under the brutal dictatorship of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. During these years thousands of people were killed or driven into exile. Among those who were forced to flee was Dany Laferrière. While living in Haiti, Laferrière wrote for *Le Petit Samedi-Soir*, and worked for *Radio-Haiti International*. When his life became endangered in the late 1970s, Laferrière immigrated to Quebec. He has published a number of novels, among them: *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired* (1987), *An Aroma of Coffee* (1993), *Dining with the Dictator* (1994) and *A Drifting Year* (1997). He has received many prizes for his writing, notably the Carbet de la Caraïbe Prize, and the Edgar-Lesperance Prize.

The following excerpts are taken from Dany Laferrière's short story *One-Way Ticket*. In this story, he chronicles his journey from Haiti to Montreal, Canada, and highlights the critical moments in his life which have shaped his sense of identity.

That morning, I was sitting in front of Paul's father, at the breakfast table. Paul was sleeping off last night's drinks.

"But really! Really! I never would have believed this... Claude Ryan asking us to vote for the Parti Québécois in his editorial in *Le Devoir*."

Le Devoir is Quebec's big intellectual daily newspaper. Someone recently explained to me that *Le Devoir* is to Quebec what *Le Monde* is to France. Paul's father passes me the newspaper. A long, copious editorial full of nuances and reservations saying he is opposed to the *raison d'être* of the party for which he is asking people to vote (in the pure Jesuit tradition). In Haiti, you think of nothing but physically eliminating your political adversary. Here, you're asked to vote for him if it seems reasonable. Reason. In Haiti, a political adversary is an enemy. Passion. Good Lord! I'm not going to fall for Senghor's formula that asserts that "reason is Greek, and emotion, black".

"What's the importance of an editorial like this?" I ask.

"Huge. When your worst enemy comes around to your side, there's no better propaganda...."

"And what will happen when the Parti Québécois comes into power?"

"They'll finally ask the question. They'll ask Quebecers if they want to live in an independent country or stay a province."

"Well, in Haiti we had a national war to gain our independence. I had never thought that a country could become independent simply by asking its citizens: do you want to be independent?"

He looks at me worriedly. I had just spoiled the pleasure the editorial in *Le Devoir* had provided him. What a misunderstanding! I was in total admiration of the founding work done by the Quebec people. I prefer the calm morning to the bloody twilight.

People from the north believe that winter, especially snow, is the main event of the journey. It's true that it's a big part of it. But it's the move on the social ladder that fascinates me. You go abruptly from the erudite status of intellectual middle-class in Haiti to that of worker. And it's not a summer job like for young North American students. The first day I found myself in front of a machine, it took me a long moment to understand what was happening to me. In Haiti, the economic situation might be disastrous, but I had a social status. My father was a journalist, very briefly the mayor of Port-au-Prince, Assistant-Secretary of State and finally diplomat. My mother was an archivist. My grandparents lived comfortably in Petit-Goâve. And there I was in front of that machine designed to crush me (I almost lost an arm the first day), in front of all these people who believed it was the best thing that could happen to me. To them, my condition was never better. I spent the afternoon in the factory washrooms thinking about my new condition. I was a worker, an immigrant and a black. Bingo! The bottom of the barrel. I went home. I was totally down. I sat in the middle of the room, in the dark. For the first time in my life, I wasn't thinking about a political, literary or philosophical problem, but about what was happening to me in

everyday life. Real life, as they say in Quebec. The question wasn't what I would become, but rather what I planned to do with myself. For the first time my life was in my own hands. It was both terrifying and exciting. I was alone in this city. The trunk of the genealogical tree. Nobody before me, and no descendants yet. I'm no longer the son here, but I'm not yet a father. Only me. The tree will bend in the direction I will give it. The new Quebec friends I spent my evening with in the bars came mostly from those spruce little suburban cities surrounding Montreal. They didn't in fact travel too far from the family nest. From time to time, when things were going badly for them, they wouldn't be seen for one or two weeks and we would learn they had gone to recuperate at the family home (in Repentigny, Sainte Thérèse, Saint-Marc, or Joliette). As for me, there was nobody behind me. Without a net. And it's what saved me.

I still remember that during that trip, I never stopped dreaming of Montreal, which had never happened to me throughout my whole stay in Montreal. At the time, I was in Montreal by day but Port-au-Prince occupied my nights. When I'm in Port au-Prince it's rather Montreal that occupies my nights. Today, I'm in Miami, but I've never dreamed of this city. Instead I have a rather strange dream: I see myself in Montreal, on Saint-Denis Street, but the colours and smells are still those of Port-au-Prince. When I'm in a city, I live in it; when I'm no longer there, it's the city that lives in me.

To read the full-length version of this short story from the Passages to Canada series visit www.passagestocanada.com



Dany Laferrière shortly after arriving in Canada.



Dany Laferrière revising a manuscript in front of his home.



Dany Laferrière in Miami with his three daughters, Melissa, Sarah and Alexandra, and his wife, Maggie.

ACTIVITIES

1. What does Dany Laferrière say about the differences between Canadian and Haitian politics? Why does he feel that he has upset his friend's father?
2. How does Laferrière feel about his first job? Why does this affect him so profoundly? What do you think he means by: "As for me, there was nobody behind me. Without a net. And it's what saved me"?
3. What is the significance of Dany Laferrière's dream? What is his conception of home?



Ken Wiwa

Ken Wiwa is the son of murdered Nigerian writer, journalist and human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned for his campaign to protect Nigeria's Ogoni people from the environmental and cultural destruction wreaked by the Nigerian oil industry and the country's rulers. Tragically, in 1995, Saro-Wiwa was executed by Nigeria's military government. During his father's incarceration and trial, Ken Wiwa travelled the world, tirelessly lobbying world leaders, writing, speaking and campaigning for his father and the Ogoni people. Ken Wiwa's novel, *In the Shadow of a Saint* (2000) chronicles these experiences. Ken Wiwa moved to Toronto with his wife and son in May of 1999. He is a former journalist and editor at *The Guardian*, writes for the *Globe and Mail*, and is a senior resident writer at Massey College, University of Toronto.

Ken Wiwa *An Inventory of Belonging*

The following excerpts are taken from Ken Wiwa's short story *An Inventory of Belonging* in which he examines the forces that led him to make Canada his home.

I was 10 years old when my father decided to send me to school in England. When I took my seat in the aircraft at Lagos airport in Nigeria, I had no idea that I was swapping the security of an idyllic African childhood for the uncertainties of adolescence in Europe. I had no idea that I would spend the next twenty years trying, unconsciously, to get away from Nigeria. Or that when I would eventually make an accommodation with my father, my fatherland and my country, I would be living in Canada.

Which is where I am now. In a house in Toronto, delving through my memories, trying to find some rhyme and reason, a line of logic through the erratic sequence of events that brought me here.

Most immigrants have a straightforward enough reason for leaving home – religious or political persecution or the lure of a better life or opportunity abroad. Push and pull factors as I learned at school. But my story refuses to fit into such neat categories. Although there are elements of the push and pull factors in my experience, I didn't exactly come here in search of better opportunities nor was I fleeing from political persecution. Whenever I am asked "why Canada?", I usually sigh and reply enigmatically that all roads led to Canada.

Between leaving Nigeria in 1978 and the decision on a beach in France 20 years later is a circuitous and internal journey of self-discovery.

In my mind's eye I am back there again and I can hear the waves washing up against the beach, the swish of the sea, rather like the sound of the wind rustling through the trees outside my window. Mark is once again explaining that Canada is proud of its reputation as a country where writers are encouraged to come to find their voice without losing their identity. He is saying something about a mosaic but I am staring out over the ocean towards Africa. I hear his pitch but I'm not sold on the idea. Not just yet. He says something about a UN statistic that he always brings up to impress me about his country. I would normally dismiss Canada right there but then impulsiveness grips me and within six months I will be living in Canada.

I sometimes wonder as I am staring out of the window here, at the U-turns, chance meetings, reckless gambles and inspired decisions on which our lives turn. Do we actually actively make choices or are we passive ciphers of the choices that fate imposes on us? Suppose I hadn't been on that beach in Cannes, with Africa so close and yet so far? Was it really some unconscious, paradoxical desire to return to Africa that sent me on this grand detour? Because of course the irony is that when I am in this room I actually feel closer to home, to Africa than I have ever done since I left.

I often shrink from the realisation that so much of my writing is self-centred but I also suffer from the delusion that my experience reflects a wider, universal, or at least, Canadian concern. The world is shrinking, people moving around so much, mingling intermarrying, changing so quickly that we keep being told that we now live in a world without frontiers, in a global village. But I sometimes wonder in this brave new world whether it won't be more important than ever to root ourselves in something, to somewhere. We still need to fix our values in a coherent system of beliefs, to believe in something, an idea, a community of shared aspirations perhaps. We have to lay down a default identity that we turn to and cling to in times of stress and confusion and bewildering change. As James Baldwin once surmised, too much identity is a bad thing but too little can also be a problem. I imagine that's why the only shelf in my library that displays any semblance of order is the one devoted to my father's books and letters. Because my father roots me, reminds me of the place I came from. He is my default template, the clay that I mould in my own image. And so now that I have defined him, quantified his values and made sense of the questions he once posed to my sense of self, I can now look for my own answers. And when I am in here I feel reassured that he is close at hand that I can reach over and re-read his words, look between the lines, talk to him and engage in a debate with him. When I am in here, I am in my father's study, I am also back in Africa. I am in Canada. I am at home.

To read the full-length version of this short story from the Passages to Canada series visit www.passagestocanada.com



Ken Wiwa, (on the left) with childhood friends.



Ken Wiwa (on the left) with his father, Ken Saro Wiwa



Ken Wiwa at the time of his immigration to Canada.

ACTIVITIES

1. In what style is Ken Wiwa's story told? Do you think that Wiwa's memory works similarly or differently from Michelle Berry's? Explain your view.
2. What do you think Wiwa meant by, "all roads led to Canada"? Do you think that he believes that his 'passage to Canada' was based on a logical, sensible sequence of events? Why or why not?
3. Wiwa quotes the American writer, James Baldwin, who argued that "too much identity is a bad thing but too little can also be a problem." What do you think Baldwin meant by this? Why do you think Wiwa borrowed this quote? How does he relate it to himself and his relationship with his father? How might this statement apply to the Canadian situation?

Critical Thinking

1. Explain why the title "Passages to Canada" was chosen for this collection of short stories. What alternate title would you suggest?
2. Some commentators have argued that central to the immigrant experience is 'the search for home'. Explain what is meant by that sentiment and why that assessment may in fact be accurate. Do you think that any of the authors were searching for home? Did they find it in Canada? Why or why not?
3. There is an inextricable link between immigration and a nation's identity. Analyze this relationship. How has immigration affected Canada's identity?
4. In Canada, immigrants are encouraged to retain their native customs and traditions. This policy, known as multiculturalism, is central to the contemporary Canadian identity. However, some argue multiculturalism makes unifying this country more difficult. What is your view? Why?
5. What is the significance of Ken Wiwa's title, "An Inventory of Belonging"? Does Wiwa believe he belongs in Canada? Do the other authors feel that they belong? Why or why not?

Web Projects

1. Which of the readings struck you most forcefully? As a research assignment, go to the Web site www.passagestocanada.com and read the complete short story by this author. Identify and explain the central theme. Reflect on why you selected this story and how it has touched you.
2. Interview a family member or a friend about his/her story of immigration. Write a short report on this interview. Record the basic facts of the story (where, when and why). Try to incorporate some of the emotion of their experience. Was it difficult to leave the home country? What was it like trying to adapt to a new culture? Log on to www.passagestocanada.com and record your story in the Passages Archive. Share your report with the individual you interviewed.