



LESSON PLAN



The Hukou (Household Registration) System

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Essential/Central Question:

How does the hukou system impact the ability of individuals to achieve the “Chinese dream”?

Lesson Summary:

Through a role play based on members of a family featured in Rob Schmitz’s book *Street of Eternal Happiness*, students explore the ways that the household registration system, or “hukou” has affected the lives of a family from the rural province of Shandong. Implemented in 1958, this system requires every citizen of China to be registered with either a rural or urban hukou. Today, millions of Chinese citizens with rural hukou registration live as migrants in cities like Shanghai. Their hukou status, which is passed down through families and nearly impossible to change, prevents them from accessing public education, healthcare, pensions, and other services in the cities in which they live and work.

Grade levels and Courses:

This lesson was designed for a high school (9-12 grade) course in world history or AP Human Geography. It can also be adapted for English Language Arts classes.

Duration:

One 80-minute block period or two 45 minute periods

Step-by-step Description:

Materials:

Handout 1 (cut into strips), Handout 2 (video note sheet), Handout 3 (role play cards), projector and computer

Warm Up:

1. Cut up [Handout 1: Timeline of the Hukou system](#) into strips separated by date. Give each student or pair of students a date and description. Be sure that the strips are not in order.

2. Have the students assemble themselves in chronological order. Then, instruct them to read their slips aloud.
3. Discuss what patterns they notice in the timeline. What events seem to repeat themselves? What trends seem to be occurring.
4. The timeline can be printed and distributed to students for use during subsequent activities as a scaffold.

Background Context:

4. Play minutes 20:25-24:10 of Rob Schmitz's talk at the 1990 Institute about the story of Zhao, a migrant worker living in Shanghai. The role cards in the subsequent activity are based on the experiences of members of Zhao's family.

Role Play Jigsaw:

5. Divide students into six groups. Assign each group a character from the role cards on [Handout 2](#). Pass out character descriptions to each group member.
6. Have the groups read and annotate their character description using the directions on the first page of the handout.
7. Redistribute the group members into new groups so that there is at least one person representing each role in the new group. For example, a class of 30 would be redistributed from six groups of five students to five groups of six students.
8. In the new groups, have each student briefly introduce him or herself in the role of his or her character.
9. As a group, students should discuss the questions:
 - How has the hukou system impacted your character's lives?
 - Which individuals were most impacted by the hukou system?
 - In what ways should this system be reformed?

Suggestions for modifications or differentiation:

- The second part of the jigsaw can be conducted as a whole class seminar or discussion to allow for more teacher guidance and peer support.
- With more advanced or older students, the first half of the jigsaw can be eliminated so that role cards are analyzed individually before moving into small group discussions.

Recommended Summative Assessments and Extensions:

While this lesson can be used as a stand alone activity, it can also be extended with a follow up summative assessment, such as a research essay, presentation, or Socratic Seminar.

Possible prompts are provided below.

- Compare and contrast the experiences of unregistered migrants in Shanghai with those of undocumented immigrants in the United States.
- Research the conditions of migrants with rural hukou in Shanghai. Prepare an informative presentation related to one of the following topics: housing, employment, education, healthcare, or migration patterns.

Common Core Standards:CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Additional Resources for Instructors:

NPR Marketplace: "A Dream of Freedom on the Street of Eternal Happiness" (Rob Schmitz)
(<https://www.marketplace.org/2016/06/01/dream-freedom-street-eternal-happiness/>)

PRI's the World: "China's hukou system puts migrant workers at severe economic disadvantage" (<https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-05-01/chinas-hukou-system-puts-migrant-workers-severe-economic-disadvantage>)

Denzan Shira and Associates: "How to Get a Shanghai Hukou" (<https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-hukou-system-shanghai-benefits-eligibility-application-process/>)

The Economist: "China: the Largest Migration in History" (video)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNXg-kYk-LU>)