Moving Stories: Building Connection and Belonging in Times of Division

A Research-Based Guide for K12 Educators

Updated for Fall 2025

This is a comprehensive curriculum guide and facilitator's manual for educators implementing *Moving Stories*, designed to use migration narratives as a tool for building empathy, belonging, and civic connection in classrooms, while ensuring student safety, choice, and agency. We live in a time when immigration stories carry heightened risk and vulnerability. With that understanding, we have created a new question set that builds upon, and is inspired by the model of Carola Suárez-Orozco's Moving Stories Project but does not ask about student and family migration histories directly.

The Power of Connection: What Research Tells Us

Peer-reviewed studies confirm that structured migration storytelling programs like Moving Stories create measurable positive impacts for students. Research demonstrates that when students share and listen to each other's stories of movement and belonging, powerful connections emerge that transform classroom communities.

Research-Proven Benefits of Moving Stories

Enhanced Empathy and Perspective-Taking: Students who participated in migration narrative-sharing reported greater empathy and deeper understanding of peers' experiences. As one second-generation Asian-American 9th grader shared: "*What helped me feel more connected with other people is learning about them because the more you learn about someone and something, the more you know and can relate/connect.*"

Increased Social Connection and Sense of Belonging: Students consistently reported feeling "less alone" and more valued after sharing their stories. A second-generation Latino student reflected: "*I feel that I am not the only one with parents that came for a better life.*" Teachers observed improved and more inclusive classroom climates.

Strengthened Civic Engagement: Migration dialogue helps develop civic agency and collaborative problem-solving. Students gained confidence to represent their experiences and build shared purpose. One participant noted: "*I'm sometimes shy, but I did it! Helped me build my confidence in speaking in front of other people.*"

Reduced Prejudice and Improved Relationships: Structured storytelling sessions led to measurable reductions in prejudice and increased willingness to view peers from different

backgrounds more positively. As one student shared: *"When I interviewed people, I felt like I got to like them more. I feel more connected."*

Empowerment for All Students: While immigrant-origin and multilingual students especially benefit from having their experiences valued, all students gain from these conversations. A mixed-race, non-immigrant origin student reflected: *"I have the same background as others. Some of our families have the same struggles."*

Sources: Maker Castro & Suárez-Orozco (2023); Maker Castro et al. (2021); Boix-Mansilla & Uccelli (2020/2022)

The Moving Stories Approach: Rationale and Origins

"There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you."
— Zora Neale Hurston, author and anthropologist

What Do We Mean by "Moving Stories"?

Migration stories are literally everywhere. They are the histories of our communities and the experiences of our families. At a time when attitudes about immigration have become so polarized, what could we do to turn down the heat?

Moving Stories was developed by Dr. Carola Suárez-Orozco as a way to amplify the voices of young people, validate their experiences, and help them see themselves and their family experiences within the broader story of our country. As a psychologist, Carola particularly wanted immigrant-origin youth to know that "it gets better."

Since its development, Re-Imagining Migration has been piloting and refining the Moving Stories approach with teachers and students in workshops across the country. Through this ongoing collaboration with educators, we've learned how to adapt the process for different grade levels, create safer entry points for vulnerable students, and build the trauma-informed practices reflected in this guide.

The title "Moving Stories" was coined by Dr. Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. The double meaning is intentional. These stories are about moving, and by stripping away loaded words like "immigration" or images of borders, we create a new frame with which people can narrate their own, or their ancestors', experiences. And if we listen carefully, we recognize that these stories are emotionally moving as well.

Breaking Down Isolation Through Connection

From the beginning, Re-Imagining Migration envisioned young people talking to their peers and family members about their experiences with movement and migration. Currently, when English Learners are asked to share their migration stories, they often do so only with other newcomers. While that work is important and empowering, Moving Stories seeks to build dialogue across all

students, breaking down the isolation many newcomers feel while engaging peers to reflect upon and share their own family migration stories.

The Science Behind Connection

In *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport explained that prejudice "may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports... and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups."

Moving Stories in schools, supported by teachers and administrators, creates the "equal status contact" Allport envisioned—a structured opportunity for students to recognize their common humanity through shared experiences of movement, adaptation, and belonging.

Honoring All Stories

We recognize that migration experiences vary dramatically. Some families hold stories of pride and accomplishment, while others carry trauma. Some stories are recent, others distant. Some families have lost their stories in the pressure to assimilate, while others have been publicly silenced or minimized.

"I remember when we first stepped off the plane. Everything was foreign. unfamiliar. uninviting. even the air in my lungs left me short of breath. We came here to find refuge. They called us refugees so we hid ourselves in their language until we sounded just like them. changed the way we dressed to look just like them."
— J.J. Bola, Poet

We know that in our communities, some migration stories are valued more than others, and that experiences like the Middle Passage or forced expulsion of Native peoples powerfully reveal roots of inequities we face today.

By sharing Moving Stories, we interrupt what Dr. Suárez-Orozco calls "the cycle of silence" by celebrating everyday family stories of migration. We plant seeds for students to learn about themselves and their families, providing a fundamental tool for helping students better understand and communicate with their families.

"I have two siblings, they adjusted in a much better way than I did. But I think they adjusted because they decided to become Americans and I couldn't become an American so easily. I survived because I always wrote poetry as a young girl. I wrote this poetry in Spanish because the only thing I felt that I had to hold on to that was completely mine was my language."
— Marjorie Agosín, Poet

When these stories are shared with peers and teachers who listen respectfully and carefully, students' experiences become validated—they may feel more visible and connected with one another. The hope and resilience that emerge from these conversations can be transformational:

"When I first came, it was love at first sight / Dreaming about a better future / As time passes by I have learned the language and culture / Later on I became proud to be here."
— Maria Franco Silva

Introduction: Navigating Sensitive Times

We live in a time when immigration stories carry heightened risk and vulnerability. While we strongly believe in the transformative power of validation, connection, and empowering people to tell their own stories, we recognize that direct questions about migration experiences may feel unsafe or overwhelming for many students and families.

Our fundamental assumption: Everyone has moved. Migration means to move.

Sometimes that movement has been by choice, sometimes by force. In moving, we all cross borders - borders on maps and sometimes borders in our minds. Whether someone moved from one neighborhood to another, from one state to another, from one country to another, or their family moved generations ago, everyone has a story of movement and change.

This guide maintains our commitment to:

- **Validation**: Honoring all students' experiences and identities
- **Connection**: Building bridges between students through shared humanity
- **Listening**: Creating spaces for authentic dialogue
- **Empowerment**: Supporting students in choosing how and when to share

Key Modifications for Current Context:

- Questions focus on universal experiences of movement and change
- Multiple pathways for participation that don't require disclosure
- Enhanced emphasis on student choice and agency
- Trauma-informed approaches throughout
- Recognition that all movement - voluntary or forced, recent or historical - shapes who we are

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Foundational Principles for Safe Storytelling

1. Universal Approach

Frame activities around the universal human experience of movement and change:

- Everyone has moved or their family has moved at some point
- All movement involves crossing borders - on maps and sometimes in our minds
- Movement can be by choice or by force, recent or generations ago
- All movement shapes who we are and how we see the world

2. Multiple Entry Points

Provide various ways students can engage:

- Personal reflection (private journaling)
- Family conversations (optional sharing)
- Historical/literary analysis
- Community observation
- Creative expression

3. Student Agency

Students maintain complete control over:

- What they share and with whom
- How they participate
- Whether they participate at all
- The format of their expression

Preparing for Moving Stories Interviews

Step 1: Previewing the Full Process (Essential First Step)

Before any contracting or interview activities begin, students need to understand exactly what they're being asked to participate in. Transparency about the full process helps students make informed decisions about their participation.

Overview Session: "Here's What We're Going to Do"

Step 1: Explain the Complete Process (10-15 minutes) Walk students through the entire sequence:

- "Today I'm going to explain an activity called Moving Stories where you'll have a chance to interview a classmate about their family's experiences of moving or migration."
- "First, I'll show you the questions you might ask and talk about how to ask them respectfully."
- "Then you'll be paired with someone to have a private conversation where you'll interview each other."
- "After that, we'll come back together and you'll have a chance to reflect on what you learned - but only what you choose to share and only with your partner's permission."
- "Finally, we might share some general themes with the larger group, but again, only things you both agree to share."

Step 2: Show Sample Questions (10 minutes)

- Read through the age-appropriate questions they'll be choosing from

- Emphasize: "These are examples - you don't have to answer all of them, and you can skip any that don't feel right to you."
- Model a few responses yourself to show the range from general to more detailed

Step 3: Address Concerns and Questions (10 minutes)

- "What questions do you have about this process?"
- "What feels exciting or interesting about this to you?"
- "What feels scary or uncomfortable?"
- "What would help you feel safer participating in this?"

Step 4: Explain Choice and Alternatives (5 minutes)

- "Participation is completely optional. If you don't want to do interviews, you can [list specific alternatives]."
- "You can change your mind at any time - before, during, or after."
- "There are no grades based on what you share - only on how respectfully you participate in whatever way feels right to you."

Step 5: Initial Opt-In/Opt-Out (5 minutes)

- Give students a simple, private way to indicate their initial comfort level
- "On a piece of paper, write: 'I'm interested in trying this' or 'I'd prefer an alternative activity' or 'I'm not sure yet.'"
- "This isn't a final decision - just helps me know how you're feeling right now."

Before Moving Forward:

- Give students time to think about it (maybe overnight or over a few days)
- Send information home to families so they understand what their children are being asked to participate in
- Allow students to change their minds up until the activity begins

Step 2: Family Communication and Preparation

After students understand the process, encourage family conversations at home. Send a note to families explaining the Moving Stories project and actively encouraging family discussions:

Sample Family Letter:

"Dear Families,

Our class will be exploring 'Moving Stories' - learning about the universal human experience of movement and migration. We believe everyone has a story of moving or migration, whether recent or generations ago, by choice or circumstance.

We'd love your help making this meaningful for your child. Over the next few days, we encourage you to find time to talk with your child about some of these questions:

- What is a smell that brings you home? Why does it have that effect?

- What is something your family does that connects you to where they are from?
- What is a story someone in your family tells about moving or migration?
- What is something your family brought with you that you still have?
- What are words in your family's languages that are special to you?
- What is a food that tastes like home to your family?
- What made your family brave when things were hard?

These conversations are completely optional - please share only what feels comfortable for your family. The goal is to help your child think about their family's experiences and what they might want to share with a classmate.

Why these conversations matter: When children understand their family's story, they feel more connected to who they are. These conversations also help them see connections with other students' experiences.

What happens next: Students who choose to participate will interview a classmate using questions like these. They'll only share what they're comfortable sharing, and they'll have complete control over their story.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out. Thank you for helping us honor all families' stories.

Sincerely, [Teacher Name]"

Step 3: Pre-Interview Contracting Activity

Before students begin interviewing each other, it's essential to establish clear agreements about how they'll treat each other's stories. This contracting activity helps create safety and trust:

Step 1: Individual Reflection (5-10 minutes) Have students write privately about:

- "Think about a time someone asked you questions about yourself or your family and you felt good about sharing. What did they do that made you feel comfortable?"
- "Think about a time someone asked you personal questions and you didn't want to answer or felt uncomfortable. What happened that made you feel that way?"

Step 2: Pair and Share (5 minutes) Students share their reflections with a partner, focusing on what makes people feel safe vs. uncomfortable when sharing personal things.

Step 3: Whole Group Discussion (10-15 minutes) Create a class list of agreements. Guide students toward commitments like:

Our Moving Stories Agreements:

- **Listen with respect** - We give our full attention when someone is sharing
- **Honor choices** - If someone doesn't want to answer a question, we respect that
- **Keep stories safe** - What's shared between us stays between us unless the person says it's okay to share

- **Ask with care** - We ask follow-up questions because we're genuinely interested, not to be nosy
- **No pressure** - We never push someone to share more than they want to
- **Celebrate differences** - We appreciate that everyone's family story is unique and valuable

Step 4: Sign and Post Have students sign the agreement and post it visibly during interviews.

Grade-Level Question Sets

Elementary (3-5): "Stories of Change and Growing"

Core Questions (4-5 main themes):

- **"What makes you feel welcome? And, what makes you feel at home?"**
    - Tell me about a place where you felt really happy and safe. What was it like there?
    - Describe what made that place feel so good to you.
    - Tell me the story of a time you were somewhere new - What made you feel comfortable there?
- **"Tell me about foods that taste like home to your family and what makes them special."**
    - Tell me about the special things that connect your family to where they came from.
    - Describe a smell that brings you home and tell me why it has that effect.
    - Tell me about foods that taste like home to your family and what makes them special.
    - Describe something your family does that connects you to where they are from.
- **"What would you like people to know about your family's moving or migration story?"**
    - Share what you'd want people to know about your family's story of moving or migration.
    - Describe the hopes your family had about what would be good in the new place and why those details matter.
    - Tell me about what was exciting or scary about your family's moving or migration and why those details are important.
- **"Tell me about what your family keeps the same when everything else changes."**
    - Describe something your family brought with you that you still have and tell me why it's important.
    - Tell me about words in your family's languages that are special to you and what they mean.
    - Tell me the story of how your family was brave during moving or migration.

Additional Gentle Exploration Questions:

- Tell me the story of a time when you were new somewhere that you remember.
- Describe what you learned when you talked to your family about these questions.

- Tell me about a sound that makes you think of your family and why.
- Describe something about your family that makes you proud.
- Tell me what you would want other kids to know about where your family comes from.

Middle School (6-8): "Stories, Identity, and Community"

Core Questions:

1. **"What places have felt like 'home' to you, and why?"**
    - How do you define home?
    - Describe a place where you've felt like you truly belonged
    - What made that place feel like home - was it the people, the memories, the way it felt?
    - Have you ever had to leave a place that felt like home? How did that feel?
2. **"What stories do people in your family and community tell about the places that they've lived?"**
    - What stories do your parents or grandparents tell about when they were young or places they used to live?
    - Are there stories about how your family came to live where you do now?
    - What family stories help you understand what life was like before, during, or after big changes?
3. **"What do people bring with them when they start over in new places?"**
    - What special things (objects, foods, songs, traditions) does your family keep that connect to your past?
    - How do these things help people remember who they are when everything else is changing?
    - What would you want to bring with you if you had to start over somewhere new?
4. **"How do people find strength when they face big changes?"**
    - Tell about a time you or your family had to adapt to something new or difficult
    - What helped you get through that transition?
    - What did you learn about yourself or your family during that time?

Additional Exploration Questions:

- Think about a time you were new to a school, team, or group - what helped you feel welcome?
- What can our community learn from your family's experiences?
- Why might you think you and your friends from different backgrounds might have similar hopes and dreams?
- What hopes did your family have when they made big life changes?
- How do you decide who to trust with important parts of your story?

High School (9-12): "Identity, Heritage, and Connection"

Core Questions:

1. **"What's the story behind your name and how does it connect you to your family's story?"**
    - What do you know about how your first or last name was chosen?
    - How has your name connected you to family history, culture, or places?
    - Has your family's name changed over time, and if so, why?
2. **"What has your community preserved from their past as they've built their life here?"**
    - What special things (objects, foods, songs, traditions) does your family keep that connect to where you came from?
    - How have these traditions or practices changed or stayed the same over time?
    - What would you want to preserve from your family's history for future generations?
3. **"How have your ancestors' experience shaped who you are?"**
    - Who do you consider your ancestors?
    - What experiences (moving or migration, adapting, overcoming challenges) have influenced who you are?
    - What strengths do you think your family's journey has given you?
    - How do you think your family found resilience during difficult transitions?
4. **"What does 'belonging' mean to you, and how have you created it in different places?"**
    - When have you felt like an outsider or insider in different communities?
    - How do you create a sense of home or belonging in new places?
    - What helps you stay connected to who you are while also adapting to new environments?

Additional Critical Thinking Questions:

- What would you want people to know about your family's experiences of moving or migration and starting over?
- What skills, talents, and perspectives does your family bring that help communities grow?
- How might your own experiences of change help you understand current events differently?
- What can our school/community learn from your background and experiences?
- What hopes drove your family to make big life changes or moves?
- How do you decide what parts of your family's story to share with others?

Conducting Moving Stories Interviews in Schools

Strategic Pairing Considerations

Thoughtful Pairing Strategies:

- **Mix comfort levels**: Pair naturally outgoing students with more reserved ones - the reserved student often feels safer being interviewed by someone confident
- **Cross-cultural pairing**: When possible, pair students from different backgrounds to maximize learning and connection

- **Avoid close friends initially**: Friends may think they already know each other's stories and miss opportunities for deeper discovery
- **Consider language needs**: If students share home languages, they might help each other feel more comfortable, but don't assume this is always best
- **Watch power dynamics**: Avoid pairing students with a history of conflict or where one might dominate the conversation

Red Flag Pairings to Avoid:

- Students who have bullied or been unkind to each other
- Students where one has significantly more social power
- Pairings where you know family situations might create tension

Interview Structure and Timing

Recommended Format:

- **5 minutes**: Review agreements and choose 3-4 questions together
- **15 minutes**: Student A interviews Student B
- **5 minutes**: Break/reflection time
- **15 minutes**: Student B interviews Student A
- **10 minutes**: Both partners reflect together on what they learned

Creating the Right Environment:

- **Physical space**: Set up pairs around the room so they're not overhearing each other
- **Noise level**: Play soft background music to mask conversations and create privacy
- **Teacher role**: Circulate quietly, offering encouragement but not hovering
- **Materials**: Provide clipboards, paper, or digital devices for note-taking if students want them

Supporting Student Interviewers

Before Interviews Begin: Model good interviewing by having a student interview you first, demonstrating:

- How to ask follow-up questions: "Can you tell me more about that?" "What was that like for you?"
- How to respond when someone doesn't want to answer: "That's totally fine, let's try a different question"
- How to show you're listening: eye contact, nodding, "That sounds really important to your family"

Sentence Starters for Nervous Interviewers:

- "I'm curious about..."
- "That's interesting, can you tell me more about..."
- "What was that experience like for you?"
- "How did that make you feel?"
- "That reminds me of... do you think there's a connection?"

Managing the Interviews

Teacher Moves During Interviews:

- **Quiet circulation**: Move around but don't interrupt unless there's a problem
- **Gentle redirects**: If you hear someone pushing too hard, quietly remind them of the agreements
- **Encouragement**: Give thumbs up or quiet nods to students who are listening well
- **Time keeping**: Give gentle time warnings ("5 more minutes for this round")

When Things Get Emotional:

- **Normalize feelings**: "Sometimes these conversations bring up big feelings, and that's okay"
- **Offer choices**: "Would you like to take a break, keep going, or try a different question?"
- **Have support ready**: Know which counselor or support person students can check in with

If a Student Shuts Down:

- **Don't force it**: "It's completely okay not to share. Would you rather listen today?"
- **Offer alternatives**: "Would you rather write about this privately?" or "Would you like to interview me instead?"
- **Follow up privately**: Check in with the student later to make sure they're okay

Accommodations for Different Learners

For English Language Learners:

- Allow interviews in home languages if both students speak it
- Provide key vocabulary ahead of time
- Offer drawing or visual storytelling as alternatives
- Consider having them interview older students or adults who share their language

For Students with Social Anxiety:

- Allow written interviews where they exchange questions on paper
- Let them interview you or another adult first for practice
- Provide extra time or smaller group settings
- Create option to share through art or creative projects instead

For Students Who May Be At Risk:

- Check in privately before interviews begin
- Have alternative activities ready (researching family traditions online, reading migration stories)
- Make sure they know they can opt out at any time
- Follow up individually to ensure they felt safe

Post-Interview Processing

Protecting Trust: From One-on-One to Group Sharing

Before any group sharing happens, it's essential to protect the trust built during one-on-one conversations. Use this protocol:

Step 1: Individual Reflection (5 minutes) After interviews, have each student write privately:

- "What did you learn about yourself during this conversation?"
- "What did you learn about your partner that you admire or find interesting?"
- "What would you be comfortable sharing with the larger group about your own story?"
- "What would you want to ask your partner's permission before sharing about their story?"

Step 2: Partner Check-In (10 minutes) Have interview pairs come back together to:

- Share what they each learned about themselves
- Ask explicit permission: "Is it okay if I share [specific detail] about your story with the class?"
- Practice how they might share: "I could say 'My partner shared something really interesting about...' Is that okay with you?"
- Agree on what stays between them and what can be shared

Ground Rules for Group Sharing:

- **Nothing shared without permission** - Always ask your partner before sharing any detail about their story
- **Own your own story** - You can always share your own experiences, but not someone else's
- **General themes only** - Share what you learned or felt, not specific personal details
- **Use permission phrases**: "My partner said it was okay to share that..." or "My partner taught me that..."

Safe Group Sharing Prompts: Instead of asking students to share their partner's stories, use prompts like:

- "What's one thing you learned about yourself during this conversation?"
- "What surprised you about the interview process?"
- "What did this conversation make you think about?"
- "How did it feel to really listen to someone else's story?"
- "What connections did you notice between different experiences?"

Alternative Sharing Formats:

- **Gallery Walk**: Students write anonymous reflections on sticky notes about themes they noticed
- **Partner Presentations**: Pairs work together to share something they both agree to present
- **Reflection Circles**: Focus on the process of listening and sharing, not content
- **Writing Response**: Students write about their own learning and insights

Immediate Debrief (10 minutes):

- "What's one thing you learned about yourself during this conversation?"

- "What surprised you most about the interview process?"
- "How did it feel to really listen to someone else's story?"
- "What made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable during the conversation?"

Longer-Term Follow-Up:

- Allow students to continue conversations over several days
- Provide opportunities to share highlights with the larger group (only with permission)
- Connect stories to academic content when appropriate
- Help students see patterns and connections across different experiences

This structured approach helps ensure that Moving Stories interviews become powerful learning experiences while maintaining the safety and respect that all students deserve.

Alternative Engagement Strategies

For Students Who Cannot or Choose Not to Share Personal Stories:

Academic Approach:

- Research historical migration patterns and connect to universal themes of seeking new opportunities
- Analyze literature featuring migration themes across different time periods
- Study current events through multiple perspectives while focusing on human experiences
- Examine how migration has shaped local community history
- Compare experiences of different groups who moved for various reasons throughout history

Creative Expression:

- Write fictional stories exploring themes of belonging
- Create art representing concepts of home and identity
- Develop presentations on cultural traditions (without personal disclosure)
- Design community resources for newcomers

Community Observation:

- Interview local community leaders or service providers
- Research community demographics and resources
- Study local history of population changes
- Volunteer with organizations serving diverse populations

Safety Protocols

Before Beginning Any Activity:

1. **Private Pre-Assessment:**
    - Allow students to indicate comfort level with participation
    - Provide alternative assignments for students who prefer not to engage
    - Meet individually with students who may be at risk
2. **Clear Boundaries:**
    - Explicitly state that sharing personal information is always optional
    - Remind students they can change their mind about participation at any time
    - Establish consequences for any student who pressures others to share
3. **Support Systems:**
    - Identify counselors, social workers, or trusted adults available for support
    - Prepare resources for students who may experience emotional responses
    - Have plans for addressing any disclosure that suggests safety risks

Red Flags Requiring Immediate Support:

- Any mention of undocumented status (student should be redirected to counselor)
- References to fear of deportation or family separation
- Signs of trauma responses during activities
- Peer pressure or bullying related to immigration status

Building Classroom Culture

Discussion Norms for Sensitive Topics:

Respect and Dignity:

- Every person's experience is valid and deserves respect
- No one should be pressured to share beyond their comfort level
- Questions should come from genuine curiosity, not judgment

Confidentiality:

- What's shared in our classroom stays in our classroom
- Stories belong to the people who tell them
- We ask permission before sharing others' experiences

Multiple Perspectives:

- There are many different experiences of moving, belonging, and community
- We listen to understand, not to debate or argue

- We look for connections while respecting differences

Assessment and Documentation

Evaluation Approaches That Maintain Privacy:

Portfolio Options:

- Reflection essays on universal themes (not requiring personal disclosure)
- Analysis of literature, media, or historical examples
- Creative projects exploring concepts of home, belonging, change
- Research projects on community resources or demographics

Participation Alternatives:

- Students can demonstrate learning through academic research
- Creative expression that doesn't require personal sharing
- Community service or observation projects
- Peer support roles in classroom activities

Resources for Educators

Professional Development and Preparation

Teacher Self-Reflection: Do Your Own Moving Stories Work First

Before asking students to explore their family's experiences of movement and change, educators should engage with these questions themselves. This preparation helps you understand what you're asking of students and prepares you to facilitate with empathy and awareness.

Reflect on your own experiences:

- What is a smell that brings you home? Why does it have that effect?
- What places have felt like home to you, and what made them special?
- What's the story behind your name and how does it connect you to your family's journey?
- What has your family carried forward from their past?
- What do you know about why your family moved or migrated - in this generation or in the past?
- What would you want people to know about your family's experiences of moving or starting over?

Consider your comfort level:

- Which questions felt easy to answer and which felt more vulnerable?

- What emotions came up as you reflected on your family's story?
- What parts of your story would you be comfortable sharing with colleagues? With students?
- What parts would you want to keep private?

Examine your assumptions:

- What assumptions do you hold about different types of movement (voluntary vs. forced, recent vs. historical)?
- How might your own family's experiences of migration or staying in place influence how you respond to students?
- What biases or stereotypes do you need to be aware of?

Practice facilitating:

- Try these questions with a colleague or in a professional learning community first
- Notice what it feels like to be asked these questions vs. asking them
- Practice responding supportively when someone chooses not to answer
- Develop your skills in creating safe spaces for vulnerable conversations

This personal work is essential - you cannot facilitate what you haven't experienced yourself, and students will sense whether you understand the vulnerability you're asking them to engage with.

Understanding Trauma-Informed Teaching: Before implementing Moving Stories, educators should understand how trauma can impact student responses:

- **Recognize signs**: Students may shut down, become emotional, or act out when family topics arise
- **Avoid re-traumatization**: Never pressure students to share more than they're comfortable with
- **Offer choices**: Always provide alternative ways to participate (writing privately, creative expression, academic research)
- **Know your limits**: Be prepared to refer students to counselors rather than trying to "fix" emotional responses yourself

Legal Obligations Regarding Undocumented Students:

- **Plyler v. Doe (1982)**: All children have the right to public education regardless of immigration status
- **You cannot ask about status**: Never inquire about a student's or family's immigration status
- **Confidentiality**: Student records and conversations are confidential - don't share information with immigration authorities
- **If students disclose**: If a student mentions being undocumented, redirect to a counselor immediately and don't discuss it further in class
- **Know your school policy**: Understand your school's sanctuary/safe haven policies

Recognizing Immigration-Related Stress in Students: Watch for signs that may indicate a student is dealing with immigration-related anxiety:

- Sudden changes in academic performance or behavior

- Reluctance to talk about family or home life
- Anxiety about parents being late for pickup
- Fear of field trips or activities requiring permission forms
- Questions about "what happens if..." scenarios
- Withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities

When to Refer vs. When to Support:

- **Refer immediately**: Any mention of undocumented status, deportation fears, family separation anxiety
- **Provide classroom support**: General homesickness, cultural adjustment challenges, language barriers
- **Consult with counselors**: When unsure, always err on the side of getting professional guidance

Building Cultural Competency:

- **Learn about your students' backgrounds**: Research the countries and cultures represented in your classroom
- **Understand migration patterns**: Know why families from different regions might have moved (economic opportunity, conflict, natural disasters)
- **Avoid assumptions**: Don't assume all families from the same country have the same experiences
- **Value multilingualism**: Treat students' home languages as assets, not deficits
- **Respect different disclosure comfort levels**: Some cultures are more private about family matters

Crisis Response Protocols

If a Student Discloses Undocumented Status:

1. Stay calm and don't react with shock or alarm
2. Thank them for trusting you
3. Immediately redirect: "That sounds like something our school counselor could help you think through"
4. Don't discuss it further in the classroom setting
5. Follow up privately to ensure they connected with support
6. Document according to your school's confidentiality policies

If a Student Becomes Emotional:

1. Normalize the response: "Sometimes talking about family brings up big feelings"
2. Offer choices: "Would you like to take a break, try a different question, or talk to our counselor?"
3. Don't try to counsel them yourself
4. Provide privacy if needed
5. Follow up later to check in

If a Student Reports Family Separation or Deportation:

1. Listen with compassion but don't probe for details
2. Connect them immediately with school social worker or counselor
3. Know your school's protocol for supporting students in crisis
4. Be aware of community resources that support immigrant families

Community Resources to Have Ready

Legal Support:

- Local legal aid organizations that provide immigration assistance
- Pro bono immigration lawyers in your area
- Know-your-rights resources in multiple languages

Mental Health Support:

- Counselors who specialize in immigration-related trauma
- Community organizations serving immigrant families
- Crisis hotlines with multilingual capacity

Practical Support:

- Food banks and emergency assistance programs
- Organizations that help with documentation and paperwork
- ESL classes and adult education programs for family members

Ongoing Classroom Support Strategies

Building Trust Over Time:

- Be consistent in your support and non-judgmental responses
- Learn to pronounce students' names correctly
- Display materials that reflect diverse cultures and experiences
- Address bias and stereotypes when they arise in class discussions

Supporting Academic Success:

- Connect Moving Stories themes to curriculum when appropriate
- Use students' cultural knowledge as a classroom resource
- Provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning
- Collaborate with ESL teachers and cultural liaisons

Creating Inclusive Environment:

- Celebrate diverse cultural holidays and traditions
- Include migration stories from many different groups in your curriculum
- Address bias and stereotypes directly when they arise
- Model inclusive language and respect for all families

Conclusion

In times of heightened tension and enforcement, our commitment to validation, connection, listening, and empowerment becomes even more crucial. This approach maintains the educational and social-emotional benefits of the Moving Stories framework while prioritizing student safety and agency.

Remember: The goal is not to extract stories from students, but to create conditions where all students feel valued, heard, and empowered to share as much or as little as they choose. By focusing on universal human experiences while remaining sensitive to current realities, we can build bridges of understanding while protecting our most vulnerable students.

Every student deserves to see their full humanity reflected and celebrated in our classrooms. Through careful, trauma-informed approaches to storytelling, we can honor that commitment while keeping everyone safe.