



English II: Reading: Module 2: Lesson 1: Section 4

Compare/Contrast Similar Themes Across Time Periods

Contrasting Themes

Instructions: Read the following excerpt. When you are finished, return to the lesson.

Excerpt from “My Life as An Undocumented Immigrant”
By Jose Antonio Vargas

One August morning nearly two decades ago, my mother woke me and put me in a cab. She handed me a jacket. “Baka malamig doon” were among the few words she said. (“It might be cold there.”) When I arrived at the Philippines’ Ninoy Aquino International Airport with her, my aunt and a family friend, I was introduced to a man I’d never seen. They told me he was my uncle. He held my hand as I boarded an airplane for the first time. It was 1993, and I was 12.



Source: TEDxMidAtlantic 2012 - Jose Antonio Vargas, TEDxMidAtlantic, Flickr

My mother wanted to give me a better life, so she sent me thousands of miles away to live with her parents in America—my grandfather (Lolo in Tagalog) and grandmother (Lola). After I arrived in Mountain View, Calif., in the San Francisco Bay Area, I entered sixth grade and quickly grew to love my new home, family and culture. I discovered a passion for language, though it was hard to learn the difference between formal English and American slang. One of my early memories is of a freckled kid in middle school asking me, “What’s up?” I replied, “The sky,” and he and a couple of other kids laughed. I won the eighth-grade spelling bee by memorizing words I couldn’t properly pronounce. (The winning word was “indefatigable.”)

One day when I was 16, I rode my bike to the nearby D.M.V. office to get my driver’s permit. Some of my friends already had their licenses, so I figured it was time. But when I handed the clerk my green card as proof of U.S. residency, she flipped it around, examining it. “This is fake,” she whispered. “Don’t come back here again.”

Confused and scared, I pedaled home and confronted Lolo. I remember him sitting in the garage, cutting coupons. I dropped my bike and ran over to him, showing him the green card. “Peke ba ito?” I asked in Tagalog. (“Is this fake?”) My grandparents were naturalized American citizens—he worked as a security guard, she as a food server — and they had begun supporting my mother and me financially when I was 3, after my father’s wandering eye and inability to properly provide for us led to my parents’ separation. Lolo was a proud man, and I saw the shame on his face as he told me he purchased the card, along with other fake documents, for me. “Don’t show it to other people,” he warned.

I decided then that I could never give anyone reason to doubt I was an American. I convinced myself that if I worked enough, if I achieved enough, I would be rewarded with citizenship. I felt I could earn it.

I’ve tried. Over the past 14 years, I’ve graduated from high school and college and built a career as a journalist, interviewing some of the most famous people in the country. On the surface, I’ve created a good life. I’ve lived the American dream.



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But I am still an undocumented immigrant. And that means living a different kind of reality. It means going about my day in fear of being found out. It means rarely trusting people, even those closest to me, with who I really am. It means keeping my family photos in a shoebox rather than displaying them on shelves in my home, so friends don't ask about them. It means reluctantly, even painfully, doing things I know are wrong and unlawful. And it has meant relying on a sort of 21st century underground railroad of supporters, people who took an interest in my future and took risks for me.

Last year I read about four students who walked from Miami to Washington to lobby for the Dream Act, a nearly decade-old immigration bill that would provide a path to legal permanent residency for young people who have been educated in this country. At the risk of deportation—the Obama administration has deported almost 800,000 people in the last two years—they are speaking out. Their courage has inspired me.

There are believed to be 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. We're not always who you think we are. Some pick your strawberries or care for your children. Some are in high school or college. And some, it turns out, write news articles you might read. I grew up here. This is my home. Yet even though I think of myself as an American and consider America my country, my country doesn't think of me as one of its own.



Source: Antonio_Vargas_Thursday-65, universityymca, Flickr