

## **Migration in Fiction and Autobiography**

For more than two centuries novelists and autobiographers have explored the human meaning of migration. In hundreds of stories, novels, and autobiographies, these writers have examined what it means to be uprooted, voluntarily or involuntarily, from one's homeland as well as the problems of adjusting to an entirely new environment.

The movement from one society to another is often accompanied by intense feelings of psychological dislocation. Migrants often experience a sense of profound loss at leaving their homeland as well as the pangs of adapting to a new society. Many writers report that migration often inverts generational relationships, since the young often find it easier to learn a new language and to pick up new customs than do their parents. Many authors contend that women are often more successful than men in making the transition to a new environment.

One project that can bring the subject of migration to life is to examine primary sources that allow them to analyze migration's human meaning: the pain of leaving home, the perils of voyage by sea or land, the disorientations following arrival, the traumas of resettlement, and the problems of acculturation. What, in short, is it like, to leave one's homeland and become a stranger in a strange land?

You might focus on a particular group or a specific individual. Among the questions that you might ask are these:

1. How does the author depict life in the homeland? Does the author describe an environment marked by suffering and poverty or a positive vision of life in the home country?
2. How does the author describe the decision to migrate? What events precipitated the decision to migrate?
3. Who made the decision to leave the homeland?
4. How does the author describe the journey from the homeland to the new country? What conditions did the migrant encounter at sea or on land?
5. What were the first months in the new environment like? What unfamiliar experiences did the immigrant encounter? Did the immigrant feel a sense of disorientation? Were there incidents of discrimination that the immigrant experienced?
6. In what specific ways does the new environment pose a threat to the immigrant's morality, faith, or traditions?
7. To what extent can the migrant maintain contact with relatives and neighbors who share a common background? In what ways do these people help the immigrant adjust to life in the new country?