

# Leavings

Based around the *Leavings Gallery* at the Immigration Museum

*A Unit of Work for Years 5 – 7*  
by Prue Wales

When I was asked to develop a unit of work based on the *Leaving home* gallery with my Year 7 class it was the beginning of the school year and the students were only just settling in to secondary education. Most of the students only knew the names of one or two people in the class but by the end of the unit they were all aware of the unique stories contained within the group. I had visited the *Leavings Gallery* at the beginning of the year and was particularly struck with the stories of why people left their home countries and the statement on the wall just outside the gallery, 'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step'. I chose these as the focus of the unit.

As the students and I began to work with the stimulus, I was struck by the diverse stories of immigration within the class. There were tales of a Fenian who came to Australia to escape English soldiers and a possible hanging; a family recently arrived from the United States; another from South Africa; gold prospectors; political refugees; convicts; work seekers; marriages to complete strangers; famine and moving from Serbia just as the NATO bombs struck.

After the students began to tell their family stories it became important to not romanticise them but honour them, as some included life and death situations. Thus we chose to work non-naturalistically.



Leavings (Years 5 -7)

education kit

## Lesson 1 (Single period)

### Warm-up – Captain's Ship

Students line up against a wall in the room. The teacher calls out instructions.

<i>Forward</i>	means run to the wall opposite
<i>Aft</i>	means go back to start
<i>Port</i>	means go to left the wall
<i>Starboard</i>	means go to right the wall
<i>Scrub the Decks</i>	get on hands and knees and scrub an imaginary deck
<i>Captain's Coming</i>	stand to attention and salute
<i>Man Overboard</i>	run to one of the sides and throw over an imaginary life buoy
<i>Shark Attack</i>	stand on something off the floor

Last one to do the activity is eliminated from game.

**Discussion.** Australia is a country of immigrants. Barring our indigenous population, we all come from families who have immigrated during the last two hundred or so years.

Why do people leave their country to start life in a new one? (E.g. a better life, adventure, the weather, ordered to come to penal settlement, job opportunities, war, famine, etc.)

What concerns might people have about leaving their home countries?

If you had to leave your home forever, what would you take with you?

**Write down** ten things you would pack (must fit in a suitcase).

**Group negotiation.** In groups of 4-5 discuss your lists and negotiate which ten things you would take between all of you.

**Present.** Present to the class what you would take with you dramatically. E.g. could create your objects physically using your bodies.

**Homework:** Find out some of your family's stories/histories of immigration. When they immigrated, where they came from, why they came.



## Lesson 2-3 (Double period)

### Warm-up.

#### 1. Dog and Bone

This is a game to practice moving stealthily. Students sit in a circle. One student enters the circle and lies down like a sleeping dog. A set of keys is placed near the 'dog' who closes his/her eyes. The teacher selects a student to try to pick up the keys without the dog hearing. If the dog points at the student trying to steal the bone the student resumes his/her place in the circle. When a student succeeds in stealing the bone he/she hides it somewhere in the circle. The dog opens his/her eyes and has three guesses to find the bone. If he/she does not guess correctly, another student takes the place of the dog and the game continues.

#### 2. Picture Postcards

Group walks around the room. Freeze. Move into groups of 5. Create a picture postcard of a sailing vessel. Show. Walk around room. Freeze. Move into groups of 3. Create a picture postcard of an airplane. Show. Walk around room. Freeze. Move into groups of 7. Create an image of activity in an airport/train/boat terminal. Show. Walk around room. Freeze. Move into groups of 4. Create a picture postcard advertising 'the lucky country'. Show.

**Discussion.** Students are invited to share their stories of immigration that they researched for homework. The class discuss what immigrants might experience when they arrive in a new country. They consider some of the challenges facing people immigrants, e.g. language barriers. Students choose a variety of stories they told (from different time frames) to dramatise in groups. The scenes must show – why the person/family leave, how they feel, what they pack, their preparation and departure. (Students are to invent parts of the story where there are gaps in their details)

**Group work.** The students prepare a variety of scenes. For instance they might show:

Convicts – sent away to penal colony

Parents getting a job in Australia – telling child they are all leaving

Political activist needs to escape country to avoid imprisonment

Fear of war – family decides to leave and start new life

Woman leaves family to marry a man she has never met.

**Show.** Students present their work.

**Homework.** Students are to write the immigration story of one family member. (Story should be no longer than a page. These will be used in lesson 5-6)



## Lesson 4 (Single period)

Working with non-naturalism.

### Warm-up

*Choral work* – tongue twisters and rounds

E.g. Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

She sells seashells on the seashore

Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree, etc.

**Discussion.** The class recap on some of the work so far. The teacher discusses some of the experiences immigrants might face:

The fear of leaving and moving to a new place

Language barriers

Finding way around

Finding work

Missing family, etc.

The class examine the following statement on the wall just outside of the *Leavings Gallery*.



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## *A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step*

**Activity 1.** As a whole class the group develop a piece of choral work from the statement.

*Choral Piece:*

A journey

A journey of a thousand miles

A journey of a thousand miles must begin

A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step

Once the class are familiar with the words and working together they divide into three groups. Each group creates the image of a moving vessel, e.g. a ship. The group give the vessel movement through a rocking motion, hoisting the sails etc. Once they have the movement clear they add the choral piece (above) to the action.

**Show.** Each group presents their choral/movement piece.

**Activity 2.** The students work with the statement below taken from a Nick Cave song. They begin in a whisper and build up vocally. As the students work with the piece they begin to move towards a central point and form an obelisk with their bodies. When the construction is formed they become silent.

## *From little things big things grow*

*(extract from a P.Kelly / K.Carmody song  
Comedy CD ALBUM – Chaos Music/ HMV Aust.)*

**Activity 3.** The students put activity 1 & 2 together. The groups from activity 1 space out in the room and present their choral piece and vessels one at a time, freezing when they have finished. They then move into the Nick Cave line developing the obelisk.

Present until polished.

Students asked to bring their stories to next class.



## Lesson 5 – 6 (Double period)

### Warm-up – *Captain's Ship* (see lesson 1)

**Discussion.** The students recap the work they did last lesson. They are asked look at their stories and write at the top the year of their family member's immigration and what they sought (a better life, safety, adventure, etc.)

**Class activity.** The students are asked to spread out in the room. One by one the students say 'I came to Australia in (year)'. Each student then says, "I seek ..." (a better life, adventure, etc). The students develop a round using this line which they repeat five times so that they are speaking over each other.

**Groups.** In groups of 5 the students are asked to develop a range of freeze-frames that demonstrate stages of leaving: Plan. Prepare. Pack. De-Part. Perish or Arrive! One group is asked to show the word perish, the other groups arrive at their destination.

**Show.** The groups present their images.

**Class Activity.** Teacher-in-Role

The teacher assumes the role of an immigration officer. She/he only speaks in gobbledegook. A class member acts as his/her assistant and herds the students into a line waiting to approach the immigration official with their stories in their hands. They speak in English in whispers. Students line up to see customs official with papers (stories) in their hand. The teacher keeps sending them to back of the line with help from her/his assistant. The immigrants don't understand what they are doing wrong. The official gets angry because they don't understand what is required with the paper work.

**Discussion.** The class discuss what it felt like not to understand what was required.

**Rework scene.** They play the scene again, this time falling silent with a signal from the assistant immigration officer, and dropping the papers to the floor saying, "You don't understand. All I brought with me is my story."

**Discussion.** The teacher discusses putting the non-naturalistic scenes together to create a performance that shows the diverse stories the class have.

### Putting the scenes together to create a performance piece

1. The class stand individually around the room. Each one says, "I came to Australia in (year)" They develop this as a round.
2. Each member then says, "I seek ..." (a better life, adventure, safety, etc.)
3. The students form their vessels – and present 'A Journey of a thousand miles' a group at a time.
4. They move towards centre – creating the obelisk as they build up vocally – "from little things big things grow"
5. Show still images of preparing to leave with voiceover by teacher. They are repeated 3 times. Plan, Prepare, Pack, De-Part, Perish/Survive!
6. Show teacher in role as immigration officer.

The sound grows until the students fall silent and say, "You don't understand. All I have is my story". They drop their stories on the floor.

*The students rehearse and present.*

