

## Who is My Neighbor?: Elevating Immigrant and Refugee Voices in Richmond, Virginia

By Rachel Heideman

**Synopsis:** This is a multimodal collection of texts and resources that highlight recent immigration and refugee stories in the Richmond, Virginia area. There is a focus on first-person accounts in order to highlight the uniqueness and diversity of individual experiences. The hope is that this text set can be used in schools around the Greater Richmond area to nurture understanding of the immigrant and refugee experience and elevate marginalized voices in the high school classroom.

### Guiding Inquiry Questions:

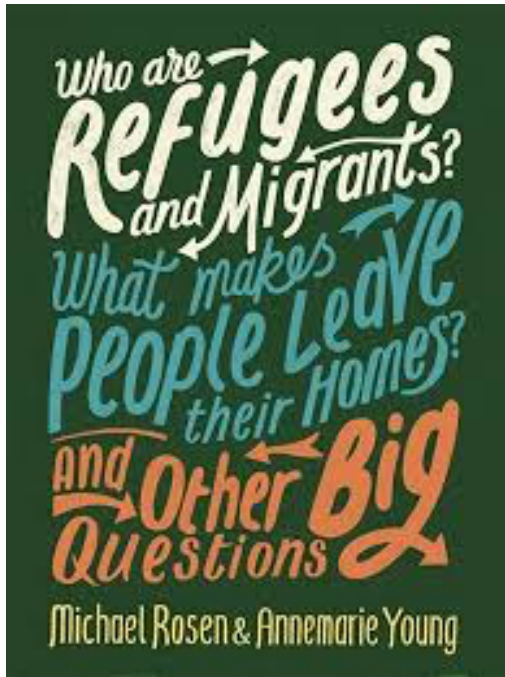
1. Who are recent immigrants and refugees in the Richmond, Virginia area? What languages, religions, and countries of origin are represented?
2. What is the experience of newly arrived immigrants and refugees to Richmond, Virginia? What are their stories?
3. How can interacting with first person accounts and memoirs break harmful or misleading stereotypes about immigrants and refugees, thus working towards a more inclusive and welcoming community?

### Contextual & Historical Information



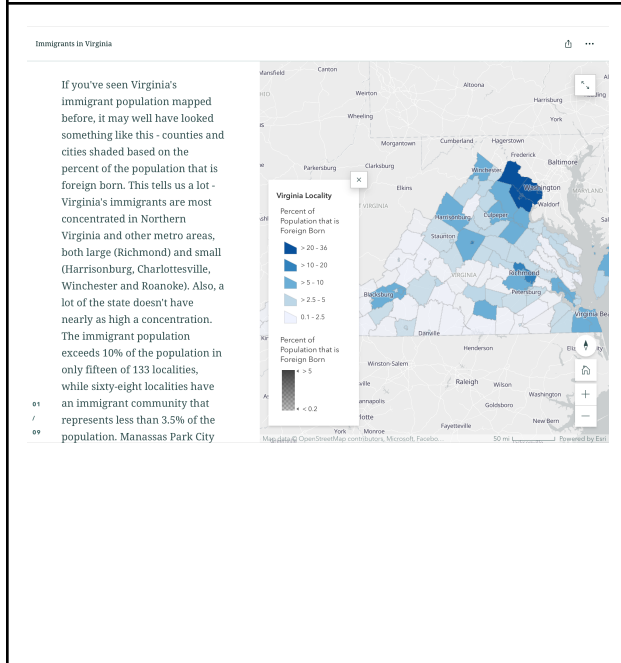
*This Land is Our Land: A History of American Immigration*  
By Linda Barrett Osborne

An exploration of government policies and popular responses to different immigrant groups throughout United States history, particularly from the 1800s to the modern day. Provides important context for students to recognize migration as a constant in the history of the country.



***Who are Refugees and Migrants? What Makes People Leave Their Homes? And Other Big Questions* by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young**

A book geared towards middle and high school students to answer questions regarding immigration and immigrant journeys. Written by UK authors, this book can also be used to compare how different countries have responded to newly arrived people versus the United States.

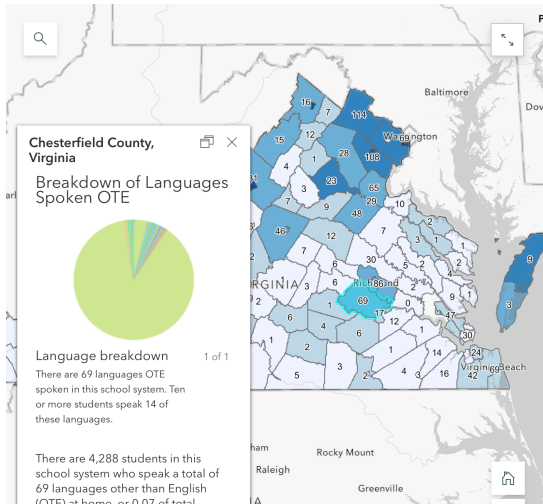


***StoryMap of Immigrants in Virginia* by Grant E. Rissler and Saltanat Leibert  
Commissioned by Virginia's Office of New Americans  
Published July 5, 2022**

Both descriptive text and interactive maps that survey immigration in the state of Virginia by region of the state. Includes detailed maps on prominent languages spoken in the home based on locality.

*Link:*

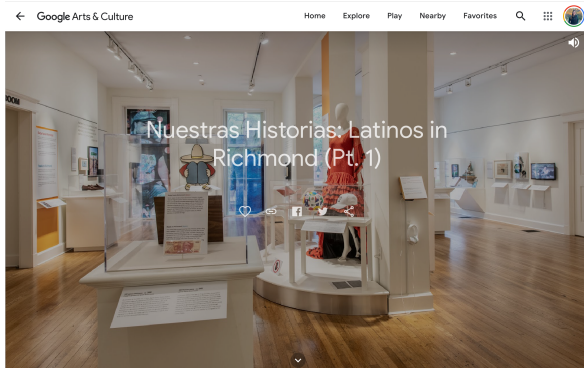
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f096d7913cb74d2c8362d087596b67f8>



***StoryMap of Linguistic Diversity in Virginia***  
**by Grant E. Riddler and Saltanat Liebert**  
**Commissioned by Virginia’s Office of New Americans**  
**Published September 15, 2022**

Provides an overview of the linguistic diversity of the state of Virginia. Interactive maps provide information about languages represented in specific school divisions. This can be used to accompany a conversation on languages and immigration as well as preservation of languages across generations, to include the practices and policies that impact families’ decisions regarding the maintenance of their home language(s).

*Link:*  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7e04607b64ce431782bb665b27b476fa>

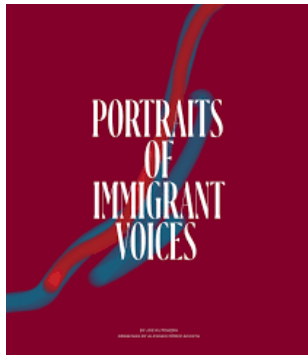


***Nuestras Historias: Latinos in Richmond***  
**Digital Collection by the Valentine Museum**

Four-part digital collection curated by local history museum The Valentine that chronicles the history of Latinx immigration in the city as well as stories of Latinx folks in the city today.

*Link:*  
[https://artsandculture.google.com/story/7wUHL\\_6KVwNNLg](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/7wUHL_6KVwNNLg)

## Richmond, Virginia Specific Activists, Artwork, Interviews, & Texts



### *Portraits of Immigrant Voices*

by **Alfonso Perez Acosta (artist)** and **Joe Kutchera (writer)**

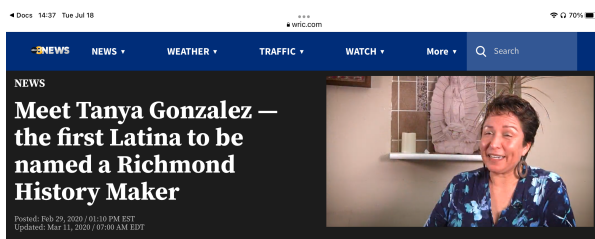
A digital art exhibition sponsored by Virginia Humanities, the City of Richmond's Office of Multicultural Affairs and Studio Two Three that showcases portraits and personal stories of 24 immigrants in the greater Richmond area.

*Digital Version of The Collection:*

<https://www.rvastrong.org/portraits#:~:text=Portraits%20of%20Immigrant%20Voices%2C%20a%20histories%20documented%20by%20Joe%20Kutchera>.

*Article Announcing the Unveiling of the Project:*

<https://richmondmagazine.com/news/sunday-story/meet-your-neighbors/>



### **ABC8 News Article entitled “Meet Tanya Gonzalez- the first Latina to be named a Richmond History Maker”**

Tanya Gonzalez is the current Executive Director of Sacred Heart Center (<https://shcrichmond.org/>) in the city whose mission is to “connect Latino families with tools to thrive and flourish”. Sacred Heart Center has been recognized for being the largest non-profit serving the recently arrived Latinx community in the city.

*Article in English:*

<https://www.wric.com/news/meet-tanya-gonzalez-the-first-latina-to-be-named-a-richmond-history-maker/>

*Article in Spanish:*

<https://www.wric.com/news/noticias/hoy-en-rva/conoce-a-tanya-gonzalez-primera-latina-en-ser-nombrada-richmond-history-maker/>



**Artist Alfonso Perez Acosta**

Colombian artist living and working in RVA who is very active in programs with newly arrived youth from Latin American countries to include *Casa Lápiz* that helps students express themselves through art and *Art Reconciliation and Civic Advocacy* that connect Latinx youth and Black youth in the Southside community of Richmond to break down cultural barriers between them.

*Website:* <https://alfonsoperezacosta.com/>

*Instagram Account:*

<https://www.instagram.com/adrawingtable/?hl=en>



## Migration Flow (2019): A Dance and Drawing Project Celebrating National Immigrants Day in Virginia

By artist Alfonso Perez Acosta

Project that places an emphasis on the beauty of the contributions that immigrants bring to their new communities. A celebratory video and collection of artwork highlighting the beauty of dance.

*Link to video & artwork:*

<https://alfonsoperezacosta.com/migration-flow>  
[w](#)

Richmond  
magazine

FOOD & DRINK NEWS & FEATURES ARTS LIVING R • HOME BRIDE BEST OF RICHMOND

## Painting a New Picture

The Narratio Fellowship helps student refugees share their stories through art | Photos by Jay Paul

BY LAURA ANDERS LEE SEPTEMBER 18, 2022



High school junior and Afghan immigrant Sobia Abed

## Magazine article from the Richmond magazine entitled “Painting a New Picture: The Narratio Fellowship helps student refugees share their stories through art”

The Narratio Fellowship is sponsored in part by the non-profit ReEstablish Richmond (<https://www.reestablishrichmond.org/>) whose mission is to “connect refugees and new immigrants to the resources needed to establish roots, build community, and become self-sufficient”.

*Link to article:*

<https://richmondmagazine.com/news/sunday-story/painting-a-new-picture/>



**Recent TedxYouth@RVA Talk entitled “Creative Languages: Transforming Barriers Into Opportunities” by artist Alfonso Perez Acosta**

Discusses the difficulties immigrants who do not yet speak English experience upon arrival to schools in Richmond, Virginia. He also shares artwork by immigrant students in the area that use creative expression to share their experiences.

*Link: <https://youtu.be/pLoMDHBQbBQ>*



**”Resettled” Podcast  
Produced by VPM Media Corporation**

A six-part series highlighting stories of refugees as they adjust to new lives in the state of Virginia. Alongside the stories are teaching moments about the resettlement process.

- Episode 1: Arrival
- Episode 2: Education
- Episode 3: Health
- Episode 4: Jobs
- Episode 5: Culture
- Episode 6: Resettled?

*<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/877090415/resettled>*

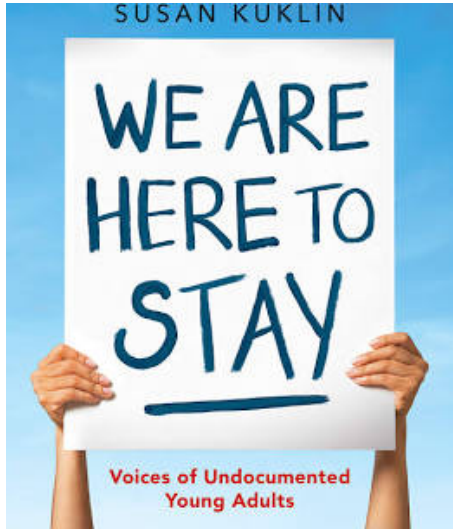


**”Settling Tables” project by Alfonso Perez Acosta**

Collection of 6 interviews with immigrants in the Richmond, Virginia area after which the artist paints a full sized picnic table telling their story.

*Links to the interviews and artwork: <https://alfonsoperezacosta.com/settling-tables>*

**Immigrant and Refugee Stories in the Greater United States:  
First Person Accounts & Memoirs**

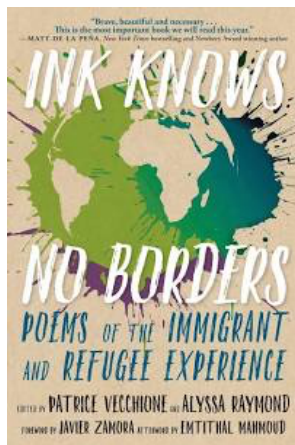


***We Are Here to Stay: Voices of Undocumented Young Adults***  
(Collected by Susan Kuklin)

Highlights the stories of nine young adults who came from Colombia, Mexico, Ghana, Independent Samoa, and Korea. Since the 2016 presidential inauguration, the original photographs of the youth were removed and only blank frames and first initials remain to protect their identities.

*Educators' Guide and Related Resources here:*

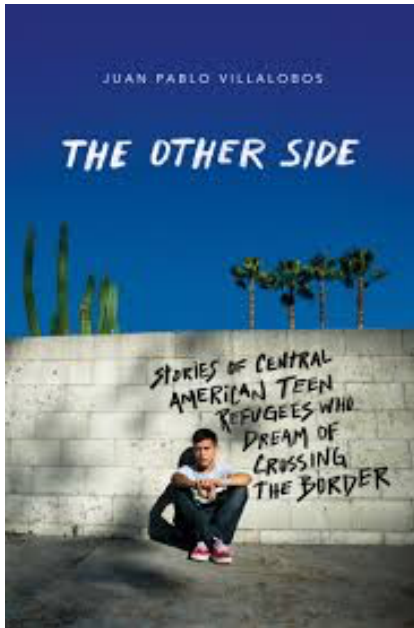
<http://www.susankuklin.net/young-adult-books/we-are-here-to-stay-voices-of-undocumented-young-adults/>



***Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience***  
Edited by Patrice Vecchione and Alyssa Raymond

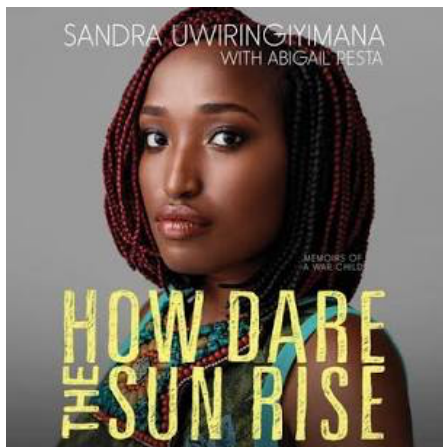
A collection of 64 poems telling the experiences of first- and second- generation young adult immigrants and refugees in the United States. Themes of identity, isolation, and racism coexist alongside those of joy, family, and cultural pride.





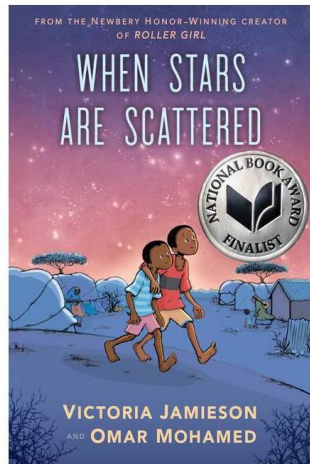
***The Other Side: Stories off Central American Teen Refugees Who Dream of Crossing the Border* by Juan Pablo Villalobos**

Stories from eleven Central American teens and their journeys to the United States that offer an inside look into this very current reality in many U.S. public schools.



***How Dare the Sun Rise* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana**

A memoir of the life of Sandra Uwiringiyimana, a girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who survived a massacre of the Banyamulenge people in 2004 at a refugee camp in Burundi. The story follows her experiences as a young child, living in a refugee camp, being resettled in New York state, and her current activism for refugees around the world.

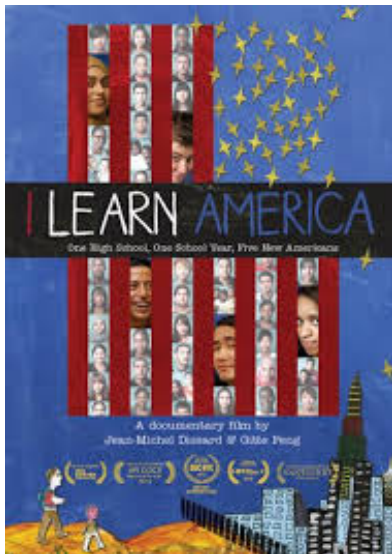


### ***When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed**

A memoir in the form of a graphic novel of the life of Omar Mohamed who grew up with his younger brother Hassan in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya after being forced to flee his home country of Somalia. Details the daily life of a child in the refugee camp as well as the arduous process of resettlement through the UNHCR.

*Link to additional resources including book trailer, educator guide, and videos from Dadaab:*

<https://www.victoriajamieson.com/educato/>



### ***I Learn America* Documentary**

Documentary that follows the lives of 5 newly arrived teenage immigrants from around the world to a Brooklyn public school in New York City:

- Brandon, age 15 from Guatemala
- Itrat, age 17 from Pakistan
- Sandra, age 17 from Poland
- Jennifer, age 17 from Dominican Republic
- Sing, age 18 from Myanmar

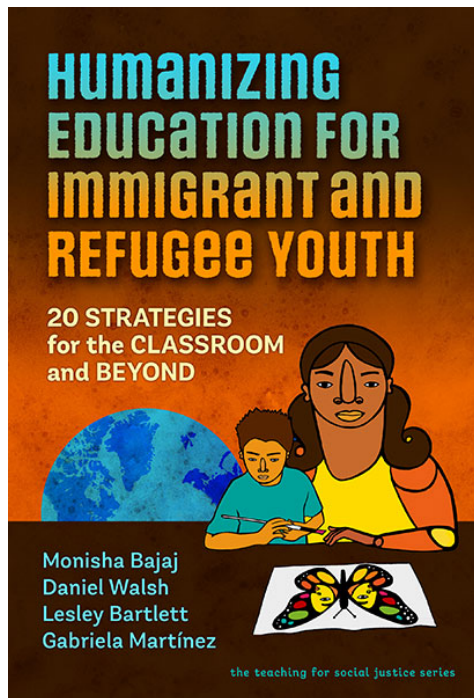
*Link to website:*

<https://ilearnamerica.com/#the-issue>

*Viewing Guide for Classrooms:*

[https://ilearnamerica.com/wp-content/themes/ILA-2017/assets/pdf/I\\_Learn\\_America\\_Viwers\\_Guide.pdf#view=fit](https://ilearnamerica.com/wp-content/themes/ILA-2017/assets/pdf/I_Learn_America_Viwers_Guide.pdf#view=fit)

## Suggested Resource for Teachers



*Humanizing Education for Immigrant & Refugee Youth* by Monisha Bajaj, Daniel Walsh, Lesley Bartlett, and Gabriela Martínez

A compilation of 20 strategies for teachers working with immigrant and refugee youth to ensure equitable classroom practices, empowering family engagement, and post-secondary success.

*Companion website to the book with recommended articles, videos, and other resources for each chapter:*

<https://www.monishabajaj.net/immigrefugeeed/#video>