Half of My Heart/La Mitad de Mi Corazón: True stories told by immigrants is a bilingual collection of personal stories told by recent immigrants mostly from Latin America. Informative and moving, the stories evoke many aspects of immigrant experience, including:

- Why we came
- Education
- Crossing the border
- Living in a new country
- Remembering home and missing family
- Speaking a new language
- Work
- Immigrants’ rights
- Hopes for the future

The stories range in length from a few lines to several pages, some with simple vocabulary, others more advanced. Photos of tellers help to bring the stories to life. (All photos and stories are used with permission, and all names are changed.) These accounts of real people’s experience, in their own words, can be used with school, college, and adult students in several subject areas.

In Social Studies (page 2), the stories allow students to understand some of the aspects and complexities of immigration through the voices of immigrants themselves, and to relate current stories to those of historical immigrants.

For ESL students (page 5), the stories in Half of My Heart/La Mitad de Mi Corazón evoke memories of their own stories, motivating them to tell about their own lives using their English.

Engaged by the compelling content of the stories, Spanish-language students (page 7) learn the vocabulary of real-life situations and can practice spoken and written language at their level. The stories also provide social context and education about the immigrant community.

The availability of both English and Spanish texts provides a useful reference point for language learners, whether ESL or Spanish.

This guide contains some activities for each subject area. All can be adapted to different grade levels, and to school-age or adult learners.
Social Studies activities

Topic: Why do people immigrate?
Level: 10-12th grade

Readings: Paragraphs 1, 2, and 5 from the Introduction: page 11.
“Why We Came” section: page 20
The first paragraphs of the following stories: Alejandra, page 44; Laura, page 58; Rafael, page 61; Juanita, page 74.

Read silently or take turns reading aloud.

Activity after reading:
1. Form groups of three.

First person:
Imagine that you are the mother (Isabela) or father (Manuel) of a family in a poor village in Mexico. You have three young children. You and your spouse used to work on a small farm but now a big agribusiness has bought all the land around your village. They have hired some of the people in the village for very low wages but not everyone can get a job. Your children are hungry. They don’t go to school because you can’t afford school fees.

Second person:
Imagine that you are Manuel’s sister or brother. You live in the United States and you work in a restaurant. You earn minimum wage but it is much more than you earned in Mexico. You are worried about your family in Mexico.

Third person:
Interview the other two. Ask Isabela or Manuel about their life. Ask them how they are going to feed and educate their children. Ask the sister or brother in the US about life in the US compared to Mexico. Ask each of them what they think about emigrating to the United States? What are their hopes and fears?

2. Three groups repeat their interviews in front of the class (more if time available).

3. Class discussion: what are the main reasons that people immigrate to the United States in the present day? What were the main reasons that people came from Europe a hundred years ago or more? Do you know when and why your own ancestors came to the US?

Some variations for middle and elementary grades,
Use fewer readings;
Read aloud;
Role play is guided by the teacher;
Draw a picture of Isabela and Manuel’s family;
Draw picture of students’ own ancestors coming to US.
Topic: What is cultural life like in Latin American countries?

Level: 9-12th grade

Readings:
Silvia, page 21; Remembering where we came from, page 23.
Read silently or take turns reading aloud.

Activities after reading:
1.* With a partner, choose any two countries represented in *Half of My Heart* (Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Ecuador, or Paraguay).
   Using the library and/or Internet, find information and images about:
   • Food—what are some typical and popular foods? Are they different from North American favorites?
   • Festivals—what holidays are celebrated in this country? Are they different from the holidays we celebrate in the United States?
   • Music—does the country have its own special music? What is it like? Who are some of the country’s best-known musicians?
   • Landscape—what is this country’s landscape like? What are its special natural features?

2. Make a display for the rest of the class using the images and information you found.

*This can be done as preparation homework or in class.

Topic: Work and Education

Grade level: High school, adaptable to middle or elementary grades

Duration:
30—50 minutes

Readings:
(All or some of) pages 27-28 (Calista, Esteban); Yolanda, page 62; Julia, 63; Claudia, page 70; Maya, page 72; Luisa, page 76; Josefina, page 80.
Take turns reading aloud in class.

Activities after reading:
Discuss the following questions with a partner, then write your answer:

1. How does Calista’s husband support their family?
2. What might Esteban’s job have been before coming to the US?
3. How does Yolanda support herself and her children? Is she fulfilling her dream?
4. How do Julia and her family feel about education? How were Julia and her husband able to afford to send their son to college?
5. What was Claudia’s job in Colombia? Is she a college graduate? What is her job now? What is the profession she hopes to have one day?
6. Why did Maya give up working in special education? Where is she working now? What does she hope for the future?
7. How old do you think Luisa is? Why did she come to the US? What is the obstacle to her education?
8. How does Josefina feel about her children? What are her children’s achievements?
9. Based on these stories, how do you think most immigrants feel about education?
10. Based on these stories, do you think it would be easy for an immigrant who has professional training to find professional work in the US?

Homework: Find out what kind of jobs most immigrants have in your community. Find out, if you can, what they earn in their jobs.

Topic: Our own immigration stories

Level: Middle or high school

Duration: 40 minutes

1. Read Barbara’s story, page 67.
2. With the class making suggestions, rewrite the story in no more than five sentences. The sequence has to capture the beginning, development, climax or turning, and end and main points, but probably will not include all details. For Barbara’s story, the sentences could be:

   • Barbara came to the United States with a dream of a better life for her family.
   • Her husband works 12 hours a day in two different jobs.
   • Barbara is trying to learn English so that she can help support her family.
   • Life has been very difficult and sometimes sad.
   • Still, she is glad to be here and glad that her children are getting an education.

3. Ask for four volunteers. One of them reads the sentences. After each sentence, the others create an instant “sculpture” together expressing that sentence. They freeze until the next sentence is read. (This is a Playback Theatre “tableau story.”)
4. Divide the class into groups of four or five. Invite them each to tell a short personal or family story.
5. The group chooses one of the stories, then brainstorm how to tell it in three to five sentences.
6. Groups practice doing their tableau stories with one person reading the sentences.
7. Each group presents their tableau story to the rest of the class.
8. Additional: take photos of each sculpture and display along with the sentence that goes with each one, forming a set of illustrated stories.

(This exercise also provides excellent practice in comprehension and narrative techniques.)
ESL activities

Beginner level:

With whole class:

1. Teacher chooses a short story from *Half of My Heart/ La Mitad de Mi Corazón*, for example, Fidelia’s story, page 25.
2. Ask students to make predictions based on section title (“Speaking a new language”).
3. Ask students for key vocabulary in story, either pre or post reading
4. Teacher reads story while students listen, following the text.
5. Teacher makes explanations as needed throughout the reading.
6. Ask comprehension questions:
   - What is the main idea?
   - Who are the characters?
   - What is the setting?
   - Were your predictions about the story correct?

In smaller groups:
Invite students to remember personal experiences similar to the teller’s.
Then share with whole class.

Adaptation for intermediate level:
Choose a longer story, eg Laura’s story, page 58.
Students use English for discussion questions.

Intermediate level:

A Better Life
1. Read a story to the students. Suggestions: Manuela, page 46; Claudia, page 70.)
2. Have them read it aloud with you.
3. With students, pick out vocabulary and list on board.
4. Students tell their own stories in pairs, small groups, or whole group, depending on size of group and confidence level.
5. Discussion: what does “a better life” mean for the students? How is it different from the life they come from?
6. Read the story again, taking turns reading aloud.
7. Students could also read the story in Spanish.

Advanced level:

Readers’ Theatre:
1. Ask students to convert a story into dialogue (in English). Suggested stories: Jorge, page 25; Caridad, page 29; Agustin, page 56; Laura, page 58; Rafael, page 61.
Create the dialogue in either partners, small groups, or at the board with suggestions from the whole class.
2. Identify the characters, then ask for volunteers to play them.
3. Read the story as a “play” in front of the class, with as much expression and body language as possible.
4. Small groups can do this with different stories, then present their “play” to the rest of the class.

**Found or parallel poetry:**
1. Choose a story (either for whole class or one story per smaller group).
2. Students find phrases in the text, distill them, then alternate with their own phrases.
3. Read aloud to the rest of the class.
Variation: Beginners can find phrases in Spanish first.

**Talk show:**
1. Divide the class into groups of 4 to 6, and give a copy of a story to each group. Suggested stories: Yolanda, page 62; Julia, page 63; Elena, page 75; Rolando, page 82.
2. Each group reads their story. Then they choose one student who will take on the role of a character in the story, the talk show guest. (There could also be more than one “guest”—perhaps a couple or two members of a family, for example, Julia and her husband or son.)
3. Each small group plans a “talk show” complete with a host who asks questions, and bilingual commercials.
4. Groups perform their talk show in front of the class. Use props!
Spanish language activities

Beginner level:

1. Provide copies of Rafael’s story, page 61, in Spanish, or project on screen.
2. Ask students to take turns reading aloud, one sentence each.
3. List and explain vocabulary words that are unfamiliar.
4. Assign paragraphs to different groups or partners and ask them to translate.
5. With the whole class, ask questions in Spanish:
   - Where did Rafael’s grandparents come from?
   - How old were they?
   - Why did they want to emigrate?
   - Why did they tell their story to Rafael?
   - How does Rafael feel about Mexico?
6. Ask students what countries their own parents, grandparents, or ancestors came from.

Intermediate level:

A Better Life
1. In Spanish, read a story about seeking a better life. Suggestions: Manuela, page 46; Claudia, page 70.
2. Have the students read it aloud with you.
3. With students, pick out vocabulary and list on board.
4. Discussion, small groups or whole class: Ask students what they think “a better life” means for recent immigrants. What did it mean for immigrants in the past?
5. Ask students to write a paragraph from the point of view of someone in a poor country wanting to immigrate. What is it about their life that they need to change? What are they hoping for?
6. Read the story again, taking turns reading aloud.
7. Students could also read the story in English.

Advanced level:

Readers’ Theatre:
Create the dialogue in partners, small groups, or at the board with suggestions from the whole class.
2. Identify the characters, then ask for volunteers to play them.
3. Read the story as a “play” in front of the class.
4. Small groups can do this with different stories, then present their “play” to the rest of the class.

Other exercises from both the ESL and Social Studies sections can also easily be adapted for Spanish language teaching.
Further resources:


*With appreciation to the ESL, Spanish, and Social Studies teachers who contributed ideas for this collection of activities; and to the people who told their stories.*

*This guide is a work in progress. Please feel free to send any comments, suggestions, or further activities to me at jo.salas@earthlink.net.*