

The state of immigration at NT

Select classes weave immigration into curriculum

IGSS, debate, and sophomore English broach topics of barriers and bridges

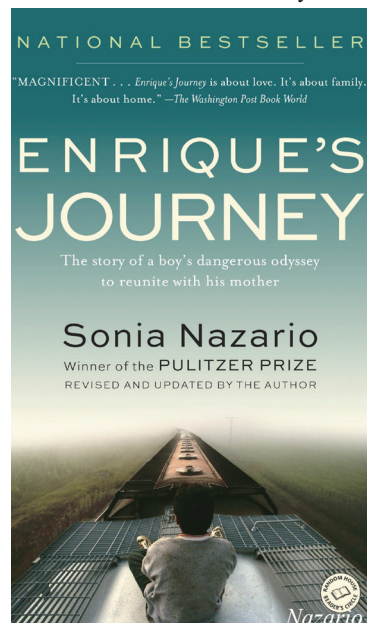
by Claudia Levens

When sophomore SJ Gray bought Enrique's Journey for his class and cracked it open, he wasn't expecting it to impact him as much as it did. He wasn't expecting to learn about the perils of trekking all the way from Honduras to the southern border of the US that many migrants experience.

"I knew a small bit about immigration, but I learned a lot from this book, especially the gruesome encounters these people have to brave through in order to make it to a possible better life," he said.

A handful of sophomore English classes read "Enrique's Journey" this year, delving into the true story written by journalist Sonia Nazario of a Honduran boy, torn apart from his family, who braves hardship to reach his mother in the United States.

"The risk taken by the



immigrants isn't emphasized in the news, and the book taught me how dangerous and unreliable the journey is, which in turn, showed me that these people have lots of determination and selflessness in order to find a better life for themselves and their families and friends," Gray said.

Sophomore English classes aren't the only places in New Trier that are discussing topics related to immigration.

This year's policy Debate resolution reads, "The United States federal government should substantially reduce its restrictions on legal immigration to the United States," meaning that debaters at NT and around the country have been



IGSS students studied topics of immigration through guest speakers, in-depth projects, and excursions

| Neslund

examining the topic in depth from many perspectives.

Senior and Policy Debater Zachary Lim said that he was excited about the resolution for the opportunity to learn more about US immigration policy: "Considering how polarized some issues are in immigration, I felt that debate was a good academic space to learn more and argue about different issues in a relatively nonpartisan fashion," Lim said.

The meticulous research that Lim and his teammates have conducted in preparing for the topic has taught him a lot about the complexity and depth within such a broad issue as immigration.

"My research, along with the research done by my peers in debate class, has been a lot of reading about the distinctions between different types of immigration, legal, illegal, and temporary, as well as the roles of different government branches, departments, and agencies."

According to senior Josie Ewing, the way we talk about something is just as important as the fact that it's being talked about. And debate often forces people to discuss immigrants in ways that are dehumanizing and characterize them as commodities.

Ewing, also a Policy Debater, emphasized that "A lot of the debates we have can get really problematic. A lot of people say that it's important to argue about and defend ideas in debates that you might not personally agree with, and that's true to some extent. But we can also forget that there are people who are personally impacted by immigration policy."

"There's kids who are immigrants, who are undocumented, etc. and this topic can force those kids to be in a debate where they might hear really terrible things about themselves," she said.

Ewing also noted that our perceived sense of separation from the issue prevents many from empathizing and understanding some

of the realities that immigrants have faced—a phenomenon which she sees as a form of dehumanization.

"Immigration gets brought up occasionally in classes but in a very disconnected way," she said. "I think most people assume—maybe rightfully—that not many NT students are immigrants. So, immigration policy ends up being more of a hypothetical rather than something that's deeply personal."

Senior Andrea Blood-Guerrero, whose mother immigrated from Colombia, shared that the topic hits close to home, but "when immigration is brought up in class discussions it is often made to feel fairly distant and a topic that most people in our community wouldn't be able to relate to."



Junior Soleia Quinn working on her door, a culminating project in the recent IGSS study of immigration

| Vargas

Despite this, Blood-Guerrero thinks that "many people in our community would be surprised by the number of students at New Trier who have immigrant parents. Even if your family doesn't have a direct relationship with immigration, I believe it's important to recognize what a profound effect it has on our nation," she said.

In addition, Blood-Guerrero noticed that most conversations about immigration take place in her history classes.

"I think it's interesting because immigration influences all subjects. It has provided the United States with some of the most influential mathematicians, scientists, and writers."

IGSS has also been talking about immigration through the lens of this year's theme of Barriers and Bridges.

"It lends itself perfectly to looking at the way people move and are restricted from moving," said IGSS Social Studies teacher Colby Vargas.

"At the end of the summer, as the separation of children debate took

speakers teaching students about immigration history by sharing first hand experiences.

Senior IGSS member Ella Stevens said that what she's learned about immigration through the theme has been important.

"We hear a lot about immigration policy in the US through the news cycles, but most people don't know a lot about what it's like around the world, how different countries navigate their immigration policies," Stevens said.

IGSS students are partaking in a United Nations Summit project where they're tasked with figuring out where to place refugees.

"It's forced us to do a lot of important, self-directed research," Stevens concluded. "I feel more capable about forming my opinion on immigration related issues. When you're able to form your own opinions, do research yourself, and are forced to defend your ideas, you have to do more thinking for yourself, and your opinions are more educated."

In addition to the UN Summit project, IGSS students are constructing doors as a nod to the novel they read about migration, "Exit West." The doors are being constructed by groups of IGSS students each representing a different country's stance on immigration in a symbolic "artistic summary," and will be on display soon, according to Vargas.

IGSS art teacher Tom Lau

