



The New Americans Viewing Party Guide

Table of Contents

- 1. About *The New Americans*.....p. 2**
- 2. How to Use this Guide.....p. 2**
- 3. Getting Started.....p. 3**
- 4. At Your Viewing Party.....p. 4**
- 5. Activity Ideas.....p. 4**
- 6. Discussion Questions.....p. 5**
- 7. Taking Action.....p. 5**

About *The New Americans*

The New Americans is a landmark documentary miniseries that reveals the remarkable sweep of immigrant experiences today through the stories of a diverse group of immigrants and refugees who leave their homes and families behind and come to live in America. The journeys include those of an Indian couple to Silicon Valley through the dot-com boom and bust; a Mexican meatpacker struggling to reunite his family in rural Kansas; two Nigerian refugee families (including the sister of slain Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa) who escape government persecution and resettle in the U.S.; two Los Angeles Dodgers prospects who follow their big dreams of escaping the barrios of the Dominican Republic; and a Palestinian woman who marries into a new life in Chicago only to discover in the wake of September 11, she cannot leave behind the pain of her homeland's conflict.

Kartemquin Films assembled a team of talented directors including the creators of [Hoop Dreams](#), [Who Killed Vincent Chin](#), and [Vietnam, Long Time Coming](#). The detailed portraits that resulted were woven into a seven-hour miniseries – which originally aired on PBS in 2004, with a rebroadcast in 2009 – that presents a kaleidoscopic picture of immigrant life and a first impression of the U.S. that few born in America can imagine.

In celebration of the 2009 rebroadcast, Active Voice has teamed up with some of our partners from the original broadcast as well as some new ones (see last page for a listing and descriptions of our partners) to reinvigorate our work from the past few years, build upon it and draw in new allies. Since 2004, *The New Americans* has truly become a classic, and we are proud to be a part of this important effort. Read our [case study](#) to learn more about how and why we brought *The New Americans* to communities across the country.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed for small groups of people who are interested in watching *The New Americans* in segments (either as a part of the 7-week broadcast, or on DVD or iTunes) and having activities and discussions related to issues of immigration, culture, citizenship and identity. With its episodic format, we hope the film series can be a good reason to regularly bring together friends, family and colleagues to engage in conversation and learn a little bit about themselves, their neighbors and each other.

This guide is meant to offer tips and guidance for a range of groups – from community-based organizations, to church groups, to informal gatherings of friends. Depending on your group and intentions, some sections may be more relevant than others. Please note that the guide does not provide a comprehensive background on the history of immigration or the cultures represented in the film. For a more in-depth overview of immigration, sector-specific framing and additional discussion questions, check out [Active Voice's modules and discussion guides](#) and [ITVS' Series Guide and Activity Book](#). (Portions of this guide have been adapted from both of these resources.)

Getting Started

- 1) Determine your viewing format.** There are several ways you can watch *The New Americans*:
 - During the PBS broadcast: The film will air over a 7-week period on PBS' Global Voices July 5 - August 16, 2009, Sundays at 10 p.m. Local times vary, so check your [local listings](#) to find out when it's playing in your city.
 - On DVD: You can buy the recently released DVD online at www.kartemquin.com.
 - On iTunes: You can even [download](#) the film on iTunes! If you're using this format for a viewing party, ideally you'll have a large computer monitor or a connector cable to a television or LCD projector.
- 2) Invite people to participate.** If you are already a part of a group that meets regularly, such as a book club, ESL class or adult Sunday school, you can ask people in the group if they'd be interested in including a film series and discussion as part of your regular convenings. If you aren't part of a group that meets regularly, you can send e-mails out to friends, colleagues, and neighbors inviting them to join in on your film club. Emphasize it as a fun opportunity to learn about each other. See our sample invitation:

Dear [xxxx],

[Date and place first]

I'm getting in touch to invite you to participate in a [weekly/monthly] film club at [my house] beginning on [date]. The landmark PBS documentary The New Americans is being re-broadcast on PBS, and I thought it would be a great reason to bring together a few friends and colleagues, share some food and learn a little bit about each other. The film specifically documents the stories of various immigrants from around the world as they pursue the American Dream in the U.S. This issue is particularly important to me because _____ and to our community because _____. I thought you'd be interested because of your [love of film/work on immigration issues/recent experiences]. My plan is to have the group meet every [week/month] to watch an episode of the series and have an accompanying activity and discussion. So far a few friends/colleagues have committed. Will you join us?

Hope so!

[Your name]

- 3) Determine your viewing schedule.** Depending on your group, and whether or not you are holding your viewing parties in conjunction with the broadcast, the frequency of your meetings will vary. But regardless, the point is to keep the group coming back so that you're engaging in an ongoing dialogue. Of course, if you're planning on watching the broadcast, your meetings will be weekly (make sure to confirm your public television station's schedule first!). But if you're using the DVD or iTunes, you may consider meeting monthly to accommodate people's busy schedules.

At Your Viewing Party

At each meeting, watch one hour-long episode of the film as a group and plan to have a discussion afterwards, using the discussion prompts in this guide. Depending on your group's willingness and capacity, we also recommend doing a group activity every time. You can refer to the Activity Ideas section below for suggestions.

At your very first meeting, it's important to build a sense of community before discussing the program. Start by providing an opportunity for people to introduce themselves, especially if you're working with a multicultural or multilingual group. Thank people for coming and invite them to introduce themselves by saying their names and where they are from or where their parents or grandparents are from. Ask the participants – working first in pairs, then as a whole group – to talk about why they're interested in seeing *The New Americans*. What brought them to this viewing party?

Activity Ideas

The following are suggestions for you and your group to consider as you plan your viewing party. You may even share this list with the group prior to your first meeting to see which activities are most appealing to them. Also, feel free to put your own spin on some of these activities or come up with your own!

- 1) **Food fair.** Every week have someone cook a traditional dish that has been handed down over generations. The cook should be prepared to talk about the significance of the dish and its origins, and s/he should come equipped with copies of the recipe to distribute to the group.
- 2) **Map activity.** The host should get a map of the world and can put it up on a wall (the group can all chip in to buy one specifically for this activity). With plenty of colored push pins handy, each participant should – one by one – place pins on the map based on where their ancestry comes from. Once everyone has put their pins up, the group should discuss the results, compare ancestries, and share stories of how their families came to the U.S.
- 3) **Music swap.** Every week have someone from the group bring music from their country of origin, prepared to discuss what makes it unique and what they like about it. If possible, that person should bring CD copies for the group.
- 4) **Language exchange.** If you have different languages and dialects spoken within your group, take the opportunity to teach one another phrases. “Hello” and “how are you?” are helpful, but try some others such as “I was born in...” or “My family has been in the US for ___ years.”
- 5) **Photo histories.** Before you gather, ask people to bring photos (or copies) from their or their ancestors' countries of origin - they can be portraits, landscapes, or any other visual representation. As an icebreaker, have people show their photos to the group and describe what they're looking at; for an added challenge, don't identify the countries at first, and have others guess the locations.



- 6) Collage of perceptions. *Note: this activity is best done prior to watching the film.* Set aside a stack of magazines, and give each participant a few sheets of paper, tape, and scissors. First ask everyone to consider which of the following term(s) they identify with most: immigrant, refugee or American. While these categories simplify the complex identities that many of us have, this exercise will help participants think about their own biases and categorizations. Once they figure out the term they most identify with, have everyone put together a collage that, in their opinion, represents each of those three words. Give them about half an hour to 45 minutes to work on this, and then regroup and have everyone share their collages and explain their thinking. After watching the film, have the group revisit their collages and see if their perceptions have changed in any way.

Discussion Questions

The New Americans raises a range of themes that are relevant to all viewers, regardless of how and why they or their families came to the U.S. The series allows viewers to experience the immigration journey over a long period of time and from multiple vantage points, so it presents many opportunities for dialogue and reflection. This section lays out various questions that all participants should use to relate what they saw in the film to their own experiences. Since the film may raise some difficult issues or strong emotions, be sure to set some guidelines prior to your discussion, specifically that it is a safe space for sharing and community-building.

After each viewing, prompt the group with the following discussion questions, and it should eventually develop into an organic, reflective conversation about immigration, shared histories, identity and culture.

- What is your immediate reaction to what you just saw?
- Where did you see yourself or your family in any of the characters in this episode?
- Were you surprised or moved by any parts of the episode, or by any of the immigrants' or refugees' experiences in particular?
- What scene or moment was the strongest for you? What made it that way?
- Was there anything in this episode that reminded you of your own community?
- Did you learn anything new in this episode? Something you may not have known about the immigrant experience in general, cultural customs of a particular group, or the way things are in the United States?

Taking Action

At the end of each viewing party, develop some next steps so that participants can reflect on what they've learned and delve a little deeper. Action steps could include:

- Inviting new allies: Have participants consider bringing someone new to the next convening to broaden the dialogue about immigrants' diverse experiences and

help bridge new understanding among those who hadn't fully considered what immigrants go through to come to this country.

- Learning more: Designate someone to find out about organizations in your area that are addressing immigrant concerns and have them come to the next meeting with print-outs from the website as well as a brief report about anything they learned. Check out Active Voice's website for resources. www.activevoice.net
- Joining local organizations: Immigrant service and advocacy organizations are always in need of volunteers and support. Once you've identified the ones near you, contact them to see how you can be of assistance. Although financial support is almost always the first need, volunteers with special skill sets, such as language, financial, legal and clinical expertise are often needed as well.
- Getting more engaged in your community: Try to maintain your knowledge of immigration issues by researching current legislation, attending workshops and town hall meetings, convening more cross-community discussions and screenings, and getting to know the cultural journeys of people around you. By doing so, you will help to create a more welcoming community for newcomers.

If you're part of an organization, you might consider some longer-term action steps:

- Build partnerships to reach "beyond the choir". If you're doing work specifically around immigrants' rights, consider developing partnerships with more mainstream organizations – such as libraries, universities, rotary clubs, etc. – to help broaden your reach and attract new constituents.
- Work with local sectors to improve services for immigrants. Many sectors interact with immigrants but don't necessarily have the training to provide culturally sensitive services. Identify leaders in law enforcement, education, health and other sectors and set up regular diversity trainings so that they can better meet the needs of immigrants in your community.
- Create more opportunities for community dialogue. Usually, anti-immigrant sentiment comes from people who haven't really interacted with an immigrant. Create more chances for bridge-building in your community by inviting opportunities for story sharing and dialogue, such as town hall meetings, film screenings, panel discussions and more.
- Include the use of story in your advocacy efforts. As you've seen by watching *The New Americans*, personal stories are a particularly effective way to demonstrate the importance of better policies to support immigrants. If you happen to be involved in any advocacy efforts, be sure to incorporate film and story in some sort of way, whether it is showing clips to policymakers, including testimonials in your advocacy e-mails, or holding community screenings.

At your very last convening, thank your group and gauge their interest in continuing to meet. If there is interest to keep the momentum going, consider what issues or themes you might be interested in exploring and have people do some research to identify potential films you might watch together. [Active Voice's website](http://www.activevoice.net) and the [Global Voices website](http://www.globalvoices.org) are good places to start.

We want to know about your viewing party! Contact info@activevoice.net to submit stories and photos and tell us how it went. And we'll be happy to offer tips on how to make your next viewing party better.

THE NEW AMERICANS NATIONAL REBROADCAST PARTNERS



Active Voice

<http://www.activevoice.net>

Active Voice uses film, television and digital media to spark social change. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with filmmakers, funders, advocates and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute outcome-oriented screenings and high profile events, repurpose digital content for web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources, and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of film-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare and sustainability.



Kartemquin Films

<http://www.kartemquin.com>

For over 40 years, Kartemquin Films has been making documentaries that examine and critique society through the stories of real people. Kartemquin's first film in 1966, *Home For Life* – a powerful chronicle of two elderly people entering a home for the aged, established the direction the organization would take over the next four decades. With a record number of films currently in development and production, Kartemquin is poised to continue this legacy for years to come. Other titles include *At the Death House Door*, *The New Americans*, *Stevie*, *5 Girls*, and its most known film, *Hoop Dreams*. Additionally, Kartemquin was recently honored to receive one of eight international 2007 MacArthur Awards for Creative and Effective Institutions.



The Independent Television Service (ITVS)

<http://www.itvs.org>

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) brings independently-produced, high-quality public broadcast and new media programs to local, national and international audiences. The independent producers who create ITVS programs take creative risks, tackle complex issues and express points of view seldom explored in the mass media. ITVS programs enrich the cultural landscape with the voices and visions of underrepresented communities, and reflect the interests and concerns of a diverse society.



OneWorld.net

<http://www.oneworld.net>

OneWorld.net is an online hub publishing news on global issues and providing support to non-profits helping to create a better world. This unique Web space is both a trusted news source and online community for organizations and individuals seeking in-depth information or guidance on how to get involved in addressing challenges facing people worldwide. Of equal importance, OneWorld is now a hub where more than 100 U.S.-based nonprofit organizations are improving their strategic expertise and building relationships to help increase effectiveness and accomplish their missions.



New America Media

<http://news.newamericamedia.org>

New America Media is the country's first and largest national collaboration and advocate of 2000 ethnic news organizations. Over 51 million ethnic adults connect to each other, to home countries and to America through 3000+ ethnic media, the fastest growing sector of American journalism. Founded by the nonprofit Pacific News Service in 1996, NAM is headquartered in California with offices in New York and Washington D.C., and partnerships with journalism schools to grow local associations of ethnic media. NAM is dedicated to bringing the voices of the marginalized - ethnic minorities, immigrants, young people, elderly - into the national discourse. The communities of the New America will then be better informed, better connected to one another, and better able to influence policy makers.