Learning Guide for

If You Only Knew
Letters from an Immigrant Teacher

by Emily Francis
About If You Only Knew

Written with passion and a visceral commitment to her students, If You Only Knew: Letters from An Immigrant Teacher reflects the journey and experiences of Emily Francis, an immigrant and unaccompanied minor who travels from Guatemala to the USA to become a teacher. Once in the classroom, as “Ms. Francis,” she learns about her students’ stories and journeys and begins seeing her own life reflected in the lives of her students. Emily starts writing letters to her students in which her story is intertwined with theirs. This offers a unique expression of empathy, which helps them on their own personal journeys as immigrants living and learning in a new country.

“I could...imagine the fear you probably felt as you prepared to walk in a brand new school in a brand new country, so I made a promise that...I would make sure your experience would be a whole lot different than the one you had in that “icebox” with immigration.”
(from the letter, “Dear Orlando”)

Speaking to both young adults and their teachers, If You Only Knew delivers support, solace, and empathy for immigrant students whose stories are too often ignored. From personal experience, Emily Francis’ mission to offer a leg-up to immigrant students deeply resonates with everyone interested in the immigrants and their journeys.

Pre-Reading Activities

INTERVIEW
with PR by the Book
https://bit.ly/3UgM31d

COUNTRY RESEARCH
Research important facts about Guatemala. Familiarize yourself with the geography, different regions, and statistics on the economy as well as the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural background.

Lesson: Students can create a Padlet presentation or a country facts sheet on Guatemala. Encourage students to add illustrations and clip art to their final work.

Get a free template download HERE

PUSH & PULL FACTORS
Share with students the possible reasons why an individual would have to leave their home country and migrate to the United States. Students can make a list of push and pull factors and perhaps be able to identify them throughout the book.

GAME
Play this ‘Migration’ Kahoot game with students and pause between answers for further discussions – Human Geography by Ms.Winkelman
https://create.kahoot.it/share/migration/084f0f-fa-0b0b-421e-83fb-e0d0ed0f8254

VIDEO
Watch this video where author Emily Francis shares a short version of her story using photographs.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O4QS-4RCopMFzKcgPp3MXrd-b2yFKbKgk/view?usp=sharing
CHAPTER 1 - ORLANDO
1. What were some of the things Ms. Francis did to make sure Orlando felt welcomed and had a sense of belonging from day one?
2. How can we have students analyze their personal experiences and begin to see their experiences as stepping stones for a successful path?
3. How can we give students a vision to see beyond the moment?
4. How was Ms. Francis able to have Orlando show his true potential?
5. How did Orlando use sports as a path to his success?

CHAPTER 2 - AIDA
1. What assumptions did Ms. Francis make when she met Aida?
2. What/Who was Aida’s motivation to be successful in school?
3. How can we validate parents and the sacrifices they make, such as staying in their home countries but sending their children to the U.S. to attend school?
4. What part of Ms. Francis’ childhood did you find interesting?
5. What were some of Ms. Francis’ responsibilities, and how did this help her family?
6. How can we help our students who have taken on a parental role and encourage them to also focus on their own education?
7. What resources would you make available to students whose parents are facing addiction?

CHAPTER 3 - CECILIA
1. How can we support students who have experienced or are experiencing family separation?
2. How did Ms. Francis help Cecilia cope with missing her family from Mexico?
3. How did Ms. Francis and her mother maintain communication and stay connected?
4. Despite the distance, staying connected and communicating helped in what ways?
5. What tools or resources are available to stay connected with parents who may be in another country while their children are attending school in the U.S.?

CHAPTER 4 - MONICA
1. SEL - In what ways can we support students who have experienced some type of immigration trauma but aren’t talking about it?
2. What was Ms. Francis’ first school experience in the U.S.?
3. What’s one negative experience Ms. Francis remembers that made her feel stupid?
4. What could her teachers have done differently to make her feel more comfortable and safe?
5. What’s Monica’s teacher doing or not doing to help Monica learn and be successful?

CHAPTER 5 - RAQUEL
1. How did Emily Francis respond to Raquel’s attitude in class?
2. Share a few ways educators can lower the affective filter to help students in need of support.
3. What’s something Emily Francis longed for while she was attending high school?
4. What did it take for Raquel to begin trusting Emily Francis?
5. What’s a ‘dark side’ Emily Francis shares with readers about herself?
6. Share some resources your district has in place for students who are expecting.
CHAPTER 6 - ALONSO

1. Why was Alonso attending high school in the U.S. while his parents were still in Mexico?
2. What did Ms. Francis and the school staff do to make sure Alonso was successful and on track to graduate high school?
3. Why was Ms. Francis offered a job at the supermarket?
4. How can we support students who are balancing school and after-school jobs?

CHAPTER 7 - MARCO

1. What was Ms. Francis’ first impression of Marco, and what can we learn from it?
2. Why did Marcos give up on school?
3. What prevented Ms. Francis from graduating high school?
4. Being a teacher was always something Ms. Francis wanted - what story does she share about how she decided to become a teacher?
5. Ms. Francis felt dysfunctional in society after dropping out of high school. What jobs did she try to apply for but wasn’t successful?
6. The GED is an option for our high school dropout students. How/When do we make this information available to our students?

CHAPTER 8 - JAIME

1. Language matters. In this chapter, Ms. Francis does NOT use the word ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ - What terms does she use to describe her and Jaime’s immigration status?
2. What are some personal connections Ms. Francis made with Jaime the first day she met him?
3. Jaime inspired Ms. Francis to make one of her biggest professional decisions. What decision did she make because of Jaime?
4. What are some of Ms. Francis’ undocumented and unaccompanied minor immigrant experiences that stuck out at you the most?
5. What resources should educators have available to support students who have experienced immigration without their parents?
6. Why were Ms. Francis and her sisters about to be deported?
7. How were Ms. Francis and her sisters able to stay in the U.S. with the proper documentation?

GENERAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What major theme is presented in this chapter? In other words, what is the connection between the student’s story and Ms. Francis’ story?
2. What are your major takeaways from this chapter?
3. How can you apply the stories presented in this chapter to your own professional learning journey?
4. What will you remember?
5. What parts of this chapter or the theme from this chapter are important for you to take with you to help you support your students?
6. What is important to integrate as you build empathy for your students?
As educators, we are responsible for protecting and advocating for our students’ greatest assets, their stories - their experiences. As you read the stories of Emily Francis and her students, keep an open mind and know that asset-based thinking is needed in order to see and unpack your students’ greatest gifts.

If you have lived the experiences found in this book, you’ll experience affirmation and validation. If you’ve never journeyed down these roads or walked in your students’ shoes, then this is a great opportunity to develop empathy and be exposed to different walks of life.


DEVELOPING EMPATHY for your English Language Learners [https://bit.ly/3dfre5n](https://bit.ly/3dfre5n)

BINGO TIME Here’s a great Identity Affirmation BINGO card our author created with 20+ activities that will help affirm and validate your students’ identities. [Make YOUR OWN COPY](#)

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**TOPICS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK**

- Sense of belonging
- Assets
- Home language
- Family separation
- Blended families
- Hidden experiences
- Hidden trauma
- Productive struggle
- Dropping out of high school
- Navigating the U.S. school system
- Connections
- Options for success
- Sense of failure
- Self advocacy
- Immigration
- Undocumented immigrant
- Unaccompanied minor immigrant
- Family reunited
- Family support
- Student’s Voice
Honoring Students’ Stories: Identity Texts to Write and Diverse Texts to Read
https://bit.ly/2CC38vs

Re-Imagining Migration: Unpacking Culture with Yuyi Morales’s book *Dreamers*
https://reimaginingmigration.org/unpacking-culture

ILA post - Affirming Individuality and Identity Through Picture Books and Storytelling

Dr. Don Vu’s Diverse books list (middle grades – high school)
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PiouK0Lswc4nPrTPgSPIF7P2Fh-G03_B/view

*When readers find reflections of themselves in literature, they are more likely to feel both visible and valued and are therefore more engaged in the reading experience.*
– Laminack & Kelly
EMILY FRANCIS’S BOOKSHELF
www.goodreads.com/emilyfranesl

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The Day You Begin and Show Way
by Jacqueline Woodson

Dreamers and Bright Star
by Yuyi Morales

Emmanuel’s Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah
by Laurie Ann Thompson

I’m New Here and Someone New
by Anne Sibley O’Brien

My Shoes and I
by Rene Colato

My Name is Jorge
by Jane Medina

Same Same but Different
by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw

After a Fall by Dan Santat

Last Stop in Market Street
by Matt de la Peña

Turning Pages
by Sonia Sotomayor

Always Anjali
by Sheetal Sheth

When Stars are Scattered
by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

Manuelito GN
by Elisa Amado and Abraham Urias

Sometimes
by Hugo Ibarra and John Seidlitz

SECONDARY

Efrén Divided and Falling Short
by Ernesto Cisneros

Areli is a Dreamer
by Areli Morales

Front Desk
by Kelly Yang

Land of Cranes
by Aida Salazar

Refugee
by Alan Gratz

Save Me a Seat
by Sarah Weeks

The Sun is Also a Star
by Nicola Yoon

Us in Progress
by Lulu Delacre

We Are Not from Here
by Jenny Sanchez

Santiago’s Road and The Only Road Home
by Alexandra Diaz

Disappeared by Francisco X. Stork

Children of the Land
by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

Indivisible by Daniel Aleman

Sanctuary
by Paola Mendoza

The Far Away Brothers
by Lauren Markham

Caminar
by Skila Brown

Solito
by Javier Zamora

Beautiful Country
by Qian Julie Wang

Travesia
by Michelle Gerster

My Family Divided
by Diane Guerrero

It’s incredibly empowering to see yourself as the hero in a book. Nothing can replace the unspoken validation a kid feels when they see themselves on the page. It confirms existence. – Matt de la Peña