



Newsletter for English Teachers About the USA – Virtual Classroom

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Back to School

By late August, summertime will be winding down and vacations will be coming to an end in the U.S., signaling that back-to-school time is near. Approximately 56 million American children (grades K-12) will be heading back to school. It's a time that many children eagerly anticipate — catching up with old friends, making new ones and settling into a new daily routine. [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Summer Must-Read for Kids? Any Book. The New York Times, August 2, 2010. A report says that for some children, the reading skills lost over the summer represent about two months worth of schooling. "[...] many children and teenagers, [...], read few, if any, books during the summer break from school. But the price for keeping the books closed is a high one. Several studies have documented a "summer slide" in reading skills once school lets out each spring. [...] Now new research offers a surprisingly simple, and affordable, solution to the summer reading slide."

Structure of U.S. Education

Education in the U.S. follows a pattern similar to that in many systems. Early childhood education is followed by primary school (called elementary school in the U.S., middle school, secondary school (high school), and then postsecondary (tertiary) education. Postsecondary education includes non-degree programs that lead to certificates and diplomas plus six degree levels: associate, bachelor, first professional, master, advanced intermediate, and research doctorate. The U.S. system does not offer a second or higher doctorate, but does offer postdoctorate research programs. Adult and continuing education, plus special education, cut across all educational levels. These links direct you to information on different aspects of the structure of U.S. education. [U.S. Dept. of Education](#)

School-level education is considered to be comprehensive from year 1 through year 12, and there are no intermediate awards prior to the completion of secondary school. Some schools and school districts will issue certificates to students who complete kindergarten, elementary or middle school, but these do not have significance other than as achievement markers for having completed the specified grades. Students who do not complete secondary school are considered to be drop-outs, as there are no recognized qualifications issued to students who do not complete secondary education through the 12th year. The only significant exceptions to this practice are the Individual Education Plans for some special education students, which may result in certificates of completion representing a different standard than the high school diploma.

The high school diploma is the basic U.S. qualification awarded to students who graduate from secondary school after 12 years of formal instruction. High school diplomas are issued by states or local districts to public school graduates, and by the school to private school graduates. Homeschooled students may or may not be issued a diploma depending on state policy and parental preference. Some diplomas may state "high school diploma" and others may state "secondary diploma (or certificate)" or simply "diploma." [More](#) (International Affairs Office, U.S. Dept. of Education)

[How does achievement of American students compare to students in other countries?](#) (Fact Facts. National Center for Education Statistics)



© [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Links for Teachers

- [The Educator's Reference Desk](#)
- [Federal Resources for Educational Excellence \(FREE\)](#)
- [The Gateway to Educational Materials on the Web](#)
- [The Internet Public Library: Education](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Supported Sites](#)

Statistics

- 3.3 million - Projected number of high school diplomas that will be awarded in the 2010-11 school year.
- As of Oct. 2008, 43% of elementary through high school students were nonwhite or Hispanic
- 22% had at least one foreign-born parent, and 5% of the children were foreign-born themselves
- 21% of schoolchildren did not speak English at home (in California, the rate was 45%)
- This fall, a projected 11% of elementary through high school students will enroll in private schools.
- 41% of 6- to 17-year-olds participated in sports in 2006, up from 34 percent in 1998.

Visit the [U.S. Census Bureau's Facts for Features page: Back to School 2010/2011](#)

'Generation Plagiarism'?

NYT Learning Network: Are You Part of 'Generation Plagiarism'? Universities are finding that plagiarism has become widespread and that many students seem to believe that copying content without giving credit is not a serious academic integrity violation. Do you think the digital age has caused confusion over acceptable practices, or is the notion of original authorship being redefined? [Read more...](#) (August 3, 2010)

In ["Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age,"](#) an article in a [series](#) that examines cheating in education and the efforts to stop it, Trip Gabriel writes: "[recent cases] suggest that many students simply do not grasp that using words they did not write is a serious misdeed. [...]" Is this true for your students? How do you approach these issues in your classroom?

- [Please No Posers.](#) Learning to Paraphrase Without Plagiarizing
- [Cite Your Sites!](#) Exploring the Internet's Role in Academic Plagiarism



[Ramadan in America](#) © America.gov

Statement by the President on the Occasion of Ramadan ([Remarks](#), August 11, 2010)

On behalf of the American people, Michelle and I want to extend our best wishes to Muslims in America and around the world. Ramadan Kareem.

Ramadan is a time when Muslims around the world reflect upon the wisdom and guidance that comes with faith, and the responsibility that human beings have to one another, and to God. This is a time when families gather, friends host iftars, and meals are shared. But Ramadan is also a time of intense devotion and reflection – a time when Muslims fast during the day and pray during the night; when Muslims provide support to others to advance opportunity and prosperity for people everywhere. For all of us must remember that the world we want to build – and the changes that we want to make – must begin in our own hearts, and our own communities.

These rituals remind us of the principles that we hold in common, and Islam’s role in advancing justice, progress, tolerance, and the dignity of all human beings. Ramadan is a celebration of a faith known for great diversity and racial equality. And here in the United States, Ramadan is a reminder that Islam has always been part of America and that American Muslims have made extraordinary contributions to our country. And today, I want to extend my best wishes to the 1.5 billion Muslims around the world – and your families and friends – as you welcome the beginning of Ramadan.

I look forward to hosting an Iftar dinner celebrating Ramadan here at the White House later this week, and wish you a blessed month.

May God’s peace be upon you.

New publication by the American Institute of Contemporary German Studies (AICGS): [The Many Sides of Muslim Integration: a German-American comparison](#)



The largest mosque in the U.S., opened by the Islamic Center of America in 2005, is in Dearborn, Michigan. Learn more: [Being Muslim in America](#)

Eid al-Fitr, often called simply Eid, is a holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. Eid is an Arabic word meaning “festival,” while Fitr means “to break the fast.” Customs differ from country to country and especially between the Arabic countries and the rest of the Muslim world, but all observances have the same basis: to break the daily fasts that were observed during Ramadan.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the month in which Muslims believe the Koran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, beginning with a simple word – iqra. For more than a billion Muslims around the world -- including some 2 to 7 million in North America -- Ramadan is a month of blessing marked by prayer, fasting, and charity.

Many of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims will observe the month of Ramadan in different ways, blending their own cultural customs with Islamic traditions of prayer and fasting. In the United States alone, Muslims come from more than 80 countries and represent a mosaic of ethnic, linguistic, ideological, social and economic groups.

Although the principal teachings of Ramadan remain consistent, the fusion between religious tradition and diverse cultures embodies the interconnectivity and diffusion of a modern, globalized world.

Links

- America.gov: [Ramadan](#)
- Answers.com: [Ramadan](#)
- TeacherPlanat: [Ramadan Theme Page](#)
- PBS: 5 Things You Need to Know About ... [Ramadan](#)

America.gov articles

- [Muslim American Spends Week on Street for Ramadan](#) (Aug. 17)
- [Muslim-American Charitable Efforts Extend Beyond Ramadan](#) (Aug. 11)
- [American Date Industry Readies Its Products for Ramadan](#) (July 30)

Building a Mosque Near Ground Zero?

A planned Islamic cultural center near the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, New York, has sparked an increasingly impassioned controversy in the United States.

On August 13, President Barack Obama stepped into one of the thorniest political conflicts of the year, using a White House Iftar dinner to issue a forceful defense of a proposal to build a mosque and Muslim community center near the area that is known to the world as Ground Zero.

PBS NewsHour: [Mosque near Ground Zero: Local Issue or Matter of National Debate?](#) President Barack Obama: “I wasn't commenting and I will not comment on the wisdom of making a decision to put a mosque there. I was commenting very specifically on the right that people have that dates back to our founding.”

Lesson Plan: NYT Learning Network: [Should a Mosque Be Built Near Ground Zero?](#) Plans to build a mosque – an Islamic place of worship – near ground zero in Manhattan are slated to move ahead despite some strong opposition from some quarters. Do you tend to support or oppose this project, and why? [More](#) (August 4, 2010)

Flushing: The Birthplace of America’s Religious Freedom

[The Birthplace of America’s Religious Freedom](#): The Flushing Remonstrance, signed in 1657 in what is now the New York neighborhood of Flushing, Queens, is the earliest known document in America to argue for religious freedom.

There are four Muslim mosques in Flushing, Queens. The size of the Muslim-American population in the United States is estimated between 2 million to 7 million. According to a 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center, 65 percent of the Muslim-American population are first-generation immigrants, and 61 percent of the foreign-born arrived in the 1990s or this decade. Seventy-seven percent of Muslims living in the United States are citizens, with 65 percent of the foreign-born being naturalized citizens.

Although Muslims live in every corner of the nation, many have settled in major metropolitan areas along the two coasts and in the Midwest: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit/Dearborn. The 10 states with the largest Muslim populations are California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Maryland. There are also established communities near state universities, which often have sizable numbers of foreign-born Muslim students and faculty. (America.gov)

The City

The current edition ([Issue 54](#)) of the [American Studies Journal](#) explores a topic that might be of particular interest to you and your students: "What is it like to grow up in urban spaces in the U.S.? Teaching "the city" is a common topic in the EFL classroom, and "youth culture" another. But both are difficult to tackle. There is always the danger of misrepresenting a topic so vast, creating stereotypes rather than questioning them and establishing a limited view on the subject. [...] Urban movements, urban planning, the ethnic roots of hip-hop culture and its enormous impact on American as well as global culture, the influence and limitations of youth-oriented American film and the attractiveness of American literature and culture reflecting the troubles of growing up in the late 20th century all come together in a mosaic of impressions and analyses. The picture is not complete, but so is youth culture: ever evolving." Please see [Teaching "Urban Cultures, Urban Landscapes: Growing Up in the American City": Further Readings and Links](#).

"The City" in Literature

Are you planning to teach "the city" in your classroom? You might want to consider the following classics in American literature:

The Beat Generation on "The City"

The Town and the City by Jack Kerouac (1950)

- [BookRags](#) | [TeacherVision](#) | [History.com](#)

Howl by Allen Ginsberg (1956)

- [NPR](#) | [eNotes](#) | [BookRags](#) | [PBS](#)

Naturalism in American Literature and the Inner-City Novel

Maggie, a Girl of the Streets by Stephen Crane (1893)

- [BookRags](#) | [MonkeyNotes](#) | [Spark Notes](#) | [eNotes](#)

Sister Carrie by Theodore Dreiser (1900)

- [eNotes](#) | [BookRags](#) | [Spark Notes](#) | [Read the book online](#)

Upcoming Publication: **My Town: Writers on American Cities**

America.gov: The First Look edition of [My Town: Writers on American Cities](#). This book features writers on the great American cities they love. Watch this fall for the full book, and for an [America.gov](#) web feature on Literary New York. The text below is excerpted from the book *My Town: Writers on American Cities*, to be published in fall 2010 by the Bureau of International Information Programs. Read selected contents in our "First Look" preview.

Ghosts By Carlo Rotella

My daughter Ling-li, who is 8, has lately been menaced by ghosts. They begin gathering at bedtime, preparing to invade her dreams. Deep in the night, awakened by a particularly vivid nightmare after a string of lesser ones, she pads down the hall to my room and comes around to my side of the bed. "I'm having Bad Thoughts," she says in the dark, her voice low. "Bring everything." I am the resident expert on bad dreams, having had them all my life: half-seen, slaving beasts surging through doors that won't lock and windows too small to fit the frame; a long walk down the corridors of hell with a baseball bat on my shoulder; the same unspeakably hideous movie on every channel and the TV won't turn off and then, somehow, I'm in the movie. Technique is an antidote to fear, I've learned, so I taught Ling-li when she was very small that an ally can enter your dreams to bring you specialized equipment you can use to repel various menaces, and that eventually, as your powers as a dreamer grow, you can dispense with the ally's intervention and train your sleeping mind to produce the equipment when you need it. [...]

When people ask me what I like about Boston I usually say that it's old (for a New World city) and you can go almost everywhere on foot. Neither quality is typical of American city life. I grew up in Chicago, a city that now feels to me like an experiment, a cyclopean model train set scattered just the other day across the prairie. All the pyramids and cathedrals of my childhood rose and fell within living memory — the high-rise housing projects marching away along the verge of the expressway, the monumental ruins of steel mills and factories tumbling in slow motion into the high prairie grass that eventually reclaims a deserted lot in Chicago. And Chicago stretches across the flat Midwestern landscape on such an inhuman scale that on a windy February night it feels as if a destination eight blocks distant lies just over the curve of the earth. [Essay](#)



New York City © U.S. Embassy Berlin

Article & Lesson Plan

Teaching Forum: [New York, New York](#) by **Thomas W. Santos**. [Exploring New York City](#) -

The feature article in this issue of English Teaching Forum focuses on one of the most famous cities in the world—New York City. This lesson plan is based on that article and the fact sheet about New York that appears at the end of this lesson plan. Every English student in the world probably knows a little about New York City; the activities in this lesson are designed to give your students the opportunity to gain more detailed information about the city. The lesson is also designed to give students an opportunity to practice an important reading skill: scanning for specific information.

America.gov: [...] From its earliest days as a Dutch settlement, New Amsterdam, on the southern tip of Manhattan Island, the community that grew into today's New York City, was relatively open and cosmopolitan. In the 1640s, when the population of New Amsterdam barely numbered 1,000, there already were some 15 languages spoken. Among these first New Yorkers were arrivals from Germany, Switzerland, Moravia, France, Portugal, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Religious qualifications, then prevalent in much of Europe, did not prove an obstacle in what would become New York. In 1655, the Dutch West India Company rejected as "unreasonable and unfair" Governor Peter Stuyvesant's request to bar from the colony a group of Jews expelled from Portuguese Brazil.

Cosmopolitan openness flowed naturally in a city that prized commerce over social class. Opportunity drew immigrants who, eager to thrive and often denied similar opportunity elsewhere, were willing to work hard, take risks and innovate. Their success helped the city grow and thrive, and it inspired others -- often from very different parts of the world -- also to seek their fortunes in New York. [...] [More on America.gov](#)

Dear Teachers –

Please let us know should you be interested in receiving a copy of the upcoming America.gov publication (The First Look edition):

[My Town: Writers on American Cities](#).

Contact: classroom@usembassy.de



Courage in the Classroom
© U.S. Dept. of Education

7.2 million - Number of teachers in the U.S. in 2008. Almost 3 million taught at the elementary and middle school level. The remainder included those teaching at the postsecondary, secondary, preschool and kindergarten levels.
\$63,640 - Average annual salary of public school teachers in California as of the 2006-2007 school year — the highest of any state. The national average was \$50,758. High school principals earned \$97,486 annually in 2007-08. [More](#)

In Focus – Ambassador Murphy’s Heroes

[Ambassador Philip Murphy](#) introduces his “heroes” in town hall meetings he holds around the country. Ambassador Murphy believes that **teachers** are incredibly important.

Across the United States, school buses are rolling out to pick up students and start a new academic year. Joining those yellow buses will be the blue motor coach. Its route will be more than 800 miles long, spanning eight states. Not a typical ride to school. Aboard the blue bus will be [U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#), headlining a Back to School tour with the theme “Courage in the Classroom: Honoring America’s Teachers.” Over the next two weeks Arne will visit schools that are facing challenges head-on—and demonstrating success. He will talk with teachers about how they are helping their students achieve and how the federal government can best support educators. The tour kicks off in the South on Aug. 26 at iconic Central High School in Little Rock, where in 1957 nine courageous teenagers were the first African Americans to desegregate the school. Follow the Back to School tour on [ED.gov](#).



Floodwall: Art Exhibition of Jana Napoli in Berlin Admission Free, September 10 thru October 15, 2010 on Board of the KURIER Ship

Floodwall, a site-specific art installation from New Orleans composed of 380 drawers that artist Jana Napoli rescued from the debris of Hurricane Katrina, will be presented in Berlin from September 10th to October 15th. Installed on the 1920s “Kurier” ship moored at several locations on the Spree, the exhibition will visit different neighborhoods across the city. Floodwall is sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, New Orleans artist Jana Napoli and the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, presenting the Berlin public with an above- & below-deck installation murmuring with the voices and stories from New Orleans. *Tue-Sun 10:00-18:00.* [Maps](#)

Further information on the exhibition and public events:
www.floodwall-berlin.de and www.drawerspeaks.org.



America.gov Publication:
[Pop Culture versus Real America](#) - U.S. television and cinema promote images of Americans that are ... well ... wrong! Pop Culture versus Real America will contrast those pop culture images with profiles of real Americans in every walk of life.

International Blog Day – August 31

What Is a Blog? The term “blog” is the shortened form of “weblog” — a diary or journal on the Web. The “blogger” (or author) writes periodically about a certain topic of his or her choosing (personal experiences, thoughts, hobbies, political aspirations, etc.). The blogger can provide links to other websites that s/he thinks might interest the audience. S/he can also allow the readers of the blog to post comments and start discussions about the blog as a whole, or about a particular episode in the blog (one day’s entry).

Type in the words “teacher blog” in any search engine and you’ll find that teachers around the world are blogging all the time about their experiences in the classroom. TeacherVision: [What is a Blog?](#)

TeacherVision: The [Internet Guide for Students and Teachers](#) - will help educators understand and present the basic concepts of the Internet by offering definitions of relevant terms, clear explanations of concepts, useful diagrams and pictures, and many resources on the Web. This guide is useful for teachers & students alike.



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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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 Questions & Suggestions? Contact: classroom@usembassy.de