

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

The materials in this unit plan are meant to be flexible and easy to adapt to your own classroom. Each chapter has discussion questions provided in a later section. However, for students reading the entire book, there are several themes that connect the stories. Through reading the book and completing any of the suggested activities, students can achieve any number of the following understandings:

*To understand a culture, you must see the daily life of many – not just the experiences of a few.  
Despite being a nation of immigration, America has a long tradition of keeping newcomers on the outside.  
Fiction can bring history to life.*

Students should be introduced to the following key questions as they begin reading, and keep them in mind as they work through the book. For this novel, the essential questions can be presented with a literary or a historical focus. Teachers are welcome to follow one thread, or combine these approaches.

### Literary

*How do you tell the story of a people?  
What defines a person's culture?  
What do outsiders bring to a culture? What do they reveal about that culture?*

### Historical

*How do we learn the history of a people?  
What makes a person American?  
What role did Japanese immigrants play in America? What did they reveal about America?*

Many of the reader response questions and suggested projects relate to these essential questions. Students are encouraged to ask these questions not only of the characters of the book, but of themselves.