



WORLD
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TACOMA

The Immigrant Stories Project

Curriculum Guide and Teaching Resources



The Tacoma Immigrant Stories Project is an ongoing initiative from the [World Affairs Council of Tacoma](#) to record, capture and present the experiences of Tacoma immigrants in their own words. From the date of its incorporation as a city, immigrants have contributed to the character and vitality of Tacoma. These brief interviews are intended to raise awareness of the immigrant experience in Tacoma and the contributions that immigrants have made to our city.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Immigrants in Tacoma p. 3

Record Your Own Immigrant Interview p. 5

Mariam K Anderson p. 8

Zahid Chaudhry p. 9

Reshma David p. 10

Leon Khalsa-Maulen p. 11

Maurice Lekea p. 12

Sok-Khieng Lim Hardy p. 13

Gadine Marie Niyotwizeye p. 14

Kerry Ramroop p. 15

Mauricio Robalino p. 16

Etga Ugur p. 17

Andreas Udbye p. 18

Iuliia Didkivska p. 19

Dr. Qudsia Khan p. 20

Ann Evans p. 21

Marisela Fleites-Lear..... p. 22

Syed Jamal p. 23

IMMIGRANTS IN TACOMA

In 2015, the Tacoma City Council passed [Resolution 39116](#) which authorized Tacoma’s membership in the Welcoming Cities and Counties Initiative. This means that Tacoma is committed to creating a welcoming, immigrant friendly environment that maximizes opportunities for economic growth and cultural vitality.

Immigrant Population in Tacoma:

According to the 2022 American Community survey, 12.5% of Tacoma’s Population is Foreign Born. Of that population, here are the main regions that the immigrant population comes from:

Region of Origin	% of Tacoma’s Immigrant Population
Southeast Asia	30.1%
Central America	20.8%
East Asia	12.6%
Eastern Europe	10.1%
East Africa	4%
Caribbean	3.3%
North America	3.1%
South Asia	3.1%
Western Europe	2.9%
Oceania	2.4%

Country of Origin	% of Tacoma’s Immigrant Population
Mexico	17.2%
Vietnam	11.6%
Korea	8.0%
Philippines	8.0%
Cambodia	6.3%
Ukraine	4.9%
Canada	3.1%
Russia	2.8%
Kenya	2.4%
China	2.3%
Germany	2.2%
Laos	2.1%

The above data is from [Town Charts](#), originally from the 2022 American Community Survey



Economic Contributions of Immigrants, Washington State:

The links below are sources that will provide an overview of Washington State's immigrant population and their contributions to our economy:

[Fact Sheet: Immigrants in Washington](#) (American Immigration Council)

[What Immigration Means to Washington, Infographic](#) (American Immigration Council)

Resources For Immigrants:

The links below are resources for organizations dedicated to helping immigrants in Tacoma.

[Tacoma Community House](#): Offer a variety of immigrant services such as immigration assistance, citizenship classes, English classes and help finding employment.

[Northwest Immigrant Rights Project](#): Provides legal assistance for immigrants.



RECORD YOUR OWN IMMIGRANT STORY INTERVIEW

The following short video from the Smithsonian Institution offers clear guidelines for conducting your own oral history interview.



The video mentions five steps:

1. Finding someone to interview

If someone in your family is an immigrant, you might want to interview them. If you do not have a family member who is an immigrant, you might be able to find a neighbor or a family friend who is an immigrant. Remember, you want this to be a positive experience for them so try to find someone who would like to share their story.

2. Preparing for the interview

Consider making up a list of sample questions that you would like to ask your interviewee. Share these questions with them in advance so they feel prepared and comfortable for your interview. There may be some topics your interviewees would prefer not to discuss, but it is more likely they have some interesting life experiences that they would like to focus on. Craft the questions so that they can tell their story in the most interesting way.



Below is a list of the questions that the World Affairs Council of Tacoma (WACT) used as the basis for the Immigrant Stories Project. You will notice from the interviews that we have adjusted the questions to reflect the different life stories of the interviewees.

It is also a best practice to have your interviewee sign a “deed of gift.” This is a statement where your subject consents to the interview with you. It can be quite simple. Here is a template recommended by the US House of Representatives:

I, [interviewee name], agree to do an interview with [interviewer name] on [date], consisting of an audio recording. I [interview name] accept the interview on [date] for inclusion to my [immigrant story] oral history project.

Obtaining permission is something that historians and researchers regularly do to ensure they are on the same page as the people they are interviewing.

3. Conducting the interview.

Interviewers are encouraged to be active listeners. It is important to be aware of this, so you do not interrupt the flow of what your subject is sharing with you. Remember, this is their story, and you want to let them tell it in their own way as much as possible.

At the same time, you want to pay attention to what your interviewee is saying so you can ask follow-up questions. Rather than automatically going down your list of questions one by one, try to encourage your interviewee to provide more explanation for topics that are particularly interesting. Taking notes during the interview is useful for planning follow-up questions.

4. Recording the interview.

It can be a challenge to remember everything from the interview just by listening and taking notes. Fortunately, most cellphones can very easily record an interview. This is described in the video above.

5. Thank your Interviewee!

They have shared memories that are especially important to them. Let them know you appreciate what they shared and what you have learned from them!



RESOURCES:

Here are a few resource sites that provide useful tips for conducting oral interviews (and were helpful in making the above list):

[Activity: Conduct Your Own Oral History](#) (From the United States House of Representatives)

[How to Do Oral History](#) (From the Smithsonian Institution Archives)

[Oral History Interviews](#) (From the American Folklife Center)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM THE WACT IMMIGRANT STORIES PROJECT:

Here is a list of questions you can use as a basis for your interview. As part of your preparation for the interview, talk to your subject and create additional questions that relate to their own specific experiences:

Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Where did you come from? Why did you leave?
3. What was the process like to get to the USA?
4. Why did you come to Tacoma?
5. If you had not come to Tacoma, what do you think you would be doing in your native country now?
6. What obstacles did you face coming to the US? Did anything shock you?
7. What would you like people to understand about immigrants in Tacoma?
8. What are some of the ways you try to contribute to Tacoma?
9. What advice do you have for immigrants coming to Tacoma today?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR MARIAM D. KURDGHELAI DZE ANDERSON
IMMIGRANT FROM THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Mariam describes her struggles both with Georgia's transition from communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and adjusting to her new life in the U.S. For more on Georgia's thirty years of independence, read this article, [Narratives of Georgia's Modern History](#).

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, Georgia](#)
2. [BBC Country Profiles, Georgia](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, Georgia](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What observations does Mariam have about life under Soviet communism?
2. Describe how the breakup of the Soviet Union impacted Mariam and her family.
3. What lessons does Mariam draw from Georgia's military conflicts with Russia?
4. What does freedom mean to Mariam? Why is it important to her?
5. What were some of the difficulties that Mariam faced in coming to the U.S.?
6. What was shocking to Mariam about life in the U.S.?
7. How is diversity regarded in Georgia compared to the U.S.?
8. Why did Mariam decide to stay in the U.S.?
9. What is Mariam doing in Tacoma now?
10. How does Mariam try to contribute to her community?
11. What advice does Mariam have for immigrants coming to Tacoma?
12. At the end of the video Mariam describes visiting Georgia. What does she miss about her life in Georgia? What does she appreciate about life in the U.S.?



CURRICULUM SHEET: ZAHID CHAUDHRY IMMIGRANT FROM PAKISTAN

Zahid is an immigrant from Pakistan and a veteran who served in the U.S. military immediately before and after the 9-11 attacks. He retired from the military after suffering an injury that required him to use a wheelchair. In this conversation he discusses his time in the military and some of the ways in which Muslims face discrimination in the U.S. The report on discriminatory immigration policies against Muslims that he discussed can be accessed here: [Muslims Need Not Apply](#). Zahid was prominently featured in the PBS documentary [American Exile](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Pakistan](#).
2. BBC Country Profiles, [Pakistan](#).
3. CIA World Factbook, [Pakistan](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Zahid's family leave Pakistan?
2. Why did Zahid relocate to Washington State?
3. Why did Zahid join the military?
4. Describe what happened to Zahid as he was crossing the border at Blaine Washington. What does this show about the environment for Muslims in the U.S. post 9-11?
5. What are the difficulties that Muslims face in immigrating to the U.S.?
6. What is Zahid's notion of service, and how have his actions reflected that?
7. What was different about how Tacoma reacted to attacks on Mosques compared to eastern Washington?
8. What are some of the contributions of immigrants to South Puget Sound that Zahid describes?
9. What does Zahid intend to convey with his example of the flowers?



CURRICULUM SHEET: RESHMA DAVID IMMIGRANT FROM INDIA

Reshma David is an immigrant from India who moved to Tacoma with her husband. Unfortunately, when her visa expired, she was forced to leave the country and move to Canada where she hoped to eventually get approval to return to the United States. For more on the rules governing the expiration of visas, you can read this [fact sheet](#) from the American Immigration Council.

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [India](#).
2. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Kerala](#) (this is the state in India that Reshma is originally from).
3. BBC Country Profile, [India](#).
4. CIA World Factbook, [India](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Describe Reshma's life in India before coming to the U.S.
2. How did Reshma feel about coming to the U.S.?
3. What did Reshma think about coming to Tacoma?
4. What did Reshma notice about life in Tacoma that made her sad? What did she do about that?
5. How did people in Tacoma treat Reshma?
6. What did Reshma do to contribute to the community in Tacoma?
7. Why did Reshma have to leave? How does she feel about that?
8. What are some of Reshma's memories of her life in Tacoma?



CURRICULUM SHEET: LEON KHALSA-MAULEN IMMIGRANT FROM GERMANY

Leon Khalsa-Maulen is a Professor of Psychology at Pierce College. To find out more about his school, you can visit the [Pierce College website](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Germany](#).
2. BBC Country Profile, [Germany](#).
3. CIA World Factbook, [Germany](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Leon describes his decision to move to the U.S. as being like an Irish knot. Why?
2. Why did Leon Decide to stay in the U.S.? What impact did this have on his relations with his family?
3. What does Leon mean when he says that getting to America is more than getting on an airplane?
4. Describe Leon's decision to become a citizen. Why did it take so long?
5. What did life in America offer Leon that he could not find in Germany?
6. Why did Leon decide to move to Tacoma?
7. What does Leon see as the positive and negative aspects of freedom in the U.S.?
8. What advice does Leon have for new immigrants to the U.S.?
9. What contributions to the country is Leon most proud of?
10. What does Leon mean when he says that becoming an American is in part fact and in part fiction?



CURRICULUM SHEET: MAURICE LEKEA,
IMMIGRANT FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Maurice is active in the Tacoma Refugee Choir and has his own podcast. If you want to learn more, you can visit these websites:

1. [Tacoma Refugee Choir](#).
2. Maurice's podcast, "[Create Home Together](#)."

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica entry, [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).
2. BBC Country Profile, [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).
3. CIA World Factbook, [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where did Maurice immigrate from?
2. Why did Maurice decide to move to Tacoma?
3. Describe Maurice's passion for helping children with disabilities.
4. Who are the people or groups that have helped Maurice? How have they helped?
5. What was the most important obstacle that Maurice faced, and why was it so important?
6. What is the negativity that Maurice has faced, and how has he dealt with it?
7. What are the contributions that Maurice makes to Tacoma?
8. What does Maurice have to say about where his home is?
9. What is Maurice's advice for other immigrants?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR SOK-KHIENG LIM HARDY IMMIGRANT FROM CAMBODIA

Please Note: This interview discusses the genocide in Cambodia and includes a reference to female genital mutilation that may be upsetting to viewers.

In this interview Sok-Khieng describes how her family escaped the Cambodian genocide, made a life for herself in the United States and later returned to Cambodia as an adult. For those of you who would like to learn more about Sok-Khieng's incredible life journey, she has written an amazing memoir: [Present for a Purpose](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Here is a link to the [Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum](#) that Sok-Khieng discusses.
2. This page from the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) provides a good introduction to the Cambodian genocide including the events that led up to it.
3. This page from the USC Shoah Foundation gives [a brief background to the genocide](#) as well as testimonies from survivors.
4. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Cambodia](#).
5. BBC Country Profiles, [Cambodia](#).
6. CIA World Factbook, [Cambodia](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were the events that led to Sok-Khieng's family leaving Cambodia?
2. What were the factors that led to Sok-Khieng's family being separated when they left Cambodia?
3. What happened on the boat trip? What were Sok-Khieng's parents told about Sok-Khieng because of the accident? What lesson does Sok-Khieng take from this?
4. What was Sok-Khieng's experience like growing up in Oregon?
5. Why did Sok-Khieng decide to start working in the field of immigration law? What were some of the important cases she had to work on?
6. What are some the ways in which Sok-Khieng contributes to Tacoma?
7. What were the killing fields?
8. Describe Sok-Khieng's visit to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia.
9. How does Sok-Khieng relate her own experience to what Ukrainian refugees are going through today?
10. What advice does Sok-Khieng have for immigrants today?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR GADINE MARIE NIYOTWIZEYE IMMIGRANT FROM RWANDA

Gadine is an immigrant from Rwanda, and she has some interesting observations on culture shock and adjusting to American eating habits. Here is an [article that compares the American diet with other countries of the world](#). Here is an article on the [basic elements of culture shock](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Rwanda](#).
2. CIA World Factbook, [Rwanda](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did Gadine end up coming to the U. S.?
2. Why did Gadine decide to stay in the U.S.?
3. Why did Gadine move to Tacoma?
4. Describe Gadine's struggles adjusting to American eating habits.
5. Who were some of the people and groups that assisted Gadine in getting settled in Tacoma?
How did they help?
6. What jobs has Gadine held in Tacoma?
7. What are some of the ways in which Gadine supports her community, and people in her community?
8. What advice does Gadine have for people coming to Tacoma?



CURRICULUM SHEET: KERRY RAMROOP IMMIGRANT FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

In this interview, Kerry Ramroop discusses some of the ways in which he encountered culture shock after moving to the U.S. Here is a [short description of the phases of culture shock](#). He also discusses some of the struggles he faced as a nurse during COVID. This [article on fourteen nurses](#) gives some fascinating personal background on what it was like to do this difficult work during COVID. [This article describes the critical role played by immigrants in the U.S. health care sector](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Trinidad and Tobago](#).
2. BBC Country Profiles, [Trinidad and Tobago](#).
3. CIA World Factbook, [Trinidad and Tobago](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What did Kerry do in Trinidad before moving to the U.S.?
2. How did Kerry meet his wife?
3. Why did Kerry relocate to Tacoma?
4. What were some of the ways in which Kerry encountered culture shock? What was different about how people interacted here compared to in Trinidad?
5. Who helped him to adjust to life in Tacoma, and how?
6. What sort of work has Kerry done in Tacoma?
7. What were some of the difficulties that Kerry encountered and saw as a nurse during COVID?
8. What advice does Kerry have for immigrants coming to Tacoma?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR MAURICIO ROBALINO IMMIGRANT FROM ECUADOR

Mauricio Robalino has lived in Tacoma for over twenty years and his artworks can be seen throughout the city. In this interview he talks about his life and some of the pieces of art he has created for the city. One of his most memorable works is for the Alberta Canada Building downtown. This article discusses the [life of Alberta Canada](#). This article discusses [Billy Ray Shirley](#), whose tragic shooting death inspired Mauricio's sculpture for the Eastside Community Center. To find out more about his art, you can visit [Mauricio's website](#).

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Ecuador](#).
2. BBC Country Profiles, [Ecuador](#).
3. CIA World Factbook, [Ecuador](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Describe Mauricio's childhood in Ecuador.
2. Describe Mauricio's decision to become an artist.
3. Describe Mauricio's family life in Tacoma.
4. What led to Mauricio's decision to move to Tacoma?
5. What is Mauricio's advice for immigrants?
6. Describe Mauricio's mural for the Pho King Restaurant.
7. Describe Mauricio's mural for the Alberta Canada Building. Who was Alberta Canada, and how does the mural depict her?
8. Describe Mauricio's sculpture for the Eastside Community Center to commemorate Billy Ray Shirley.
9. How does Mauricio describe his artistic process?
10. What do you think Mauricio means when he says that everyone has art in them, but not everyone should become an artist?
11. What does Mauricio have to say about how his art relates to the community?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR ETGA UGUR IMMIGRANT FROM TURKEY

Etga Ugur came to the U.S. over twenty years ago, right before the 9-11 terrorist attacks. In his interview he describes dealing with discrimination against Muslims in the aftermath of the attacks and his efforts to foster understanding between different communities. Etga is the author of the 2019 book, [Faith and Politics in the Public Sphere](#).

RESOURCES ON ISLAMOPHOBIA:

1. Here is a [report from a Gallup poll on anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. and other countries](#).
2. Here is a [recent report on Pew Survey about anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S.](#)
3. This [article from the Council on Foreign Relations describes efforts to combat Islamophobia](#).
4. Here is a [Seattle Times story on the arson attack on the Islamic Center of Tacoma](#).

RESOURCES ON TURKEY:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Turkey](#)
2. BBC Country Profile, [Turkey](#)
3. CIA World Factbook, [Turkey](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Etga decide to come to the U.S?
2. Describe why the 9-11 (September 11) attacks made Etga feel anxious. What are some of the things he describes?
3. What was encouraging to Etga about the way some people reacted to these attacks?
4. What concerns Etga about the way the public's view of the extremists influenced the way they perceived Muslims in general?
5. What were some of the ways in which Etga got involved in social justice groups as part of his effort to move forward?
6. Why did Etga come to Tacoma?
7. How does Etga describe the immigrant community in Tacoma?
8. Describe the arson attack on the Islamic Center of Tacoma. How did the community respond to this?
9. What are the contributions that Etga makes to Tacoma?
10. What advice does Etga have for immigrants coming to Tacoma?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR ANDRES UDBYE IMMIGRANT FROM NORWAY

Andreas Udbye initially came to Tacoma from Norway on a one-year scholarship to Pacific Lutheran University. After traveling for over 20 years between Norway and the US, he decided to settle in Tacoma and become a US citizen.

RESOURCES:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, [Norway](#)
2. BBC Country Profiles, [Norway](#)
3. CIA World Factbook, [Norway](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What brought Andreas to the United States?
2. Did he know where he was going?
3. Why did he stay?
4. Did he have culture shock? Does he still?
5. Were his immigrant roots useful in work and life? How?
6. What was his career path?
7. Do you think it was affected by his immigration decision?
8. How does he feel he fits in Tacoma?
9. Does it seem like he would rather be somewhere else? Why or why not?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR IULIIA DIDKIVSKA IMMIGRANT FROM UKRAINE

Iuliia Didkivska immigrated to Tacoma from Ukraine in 2022 after her country was invaded by Russia. Here she describes her new life in Tacoma, and ways in which she seeks to give back to the local community.

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, Ukraine](#)
2. [BBC Country Profiles, Ukraine](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, Ukraine](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did Iuliia decide to move to the US?
2. Was that an easy decision or had she planned it all along?
3. Was her move smooth and simple?
4. What did she find when she arrived in the US?
5. What did she do when she arrived in the US?
6. Has her work changed since she arrived?
7. What has she learned from her immigration?
8. What has she learned about the United States since moving here as opposed to visiting?
9. What does she think Americans should know about her people?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR DR. QUDSIA KHAN IMMIGRANT FROM PAKISTAN

Dr. Khan came to the United States as a foreign medical graduate from Pakistan. Here, she shares her story of becoming a physician in the US, learning a new culture, raising a family, and building a community in Tacoma.

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, Pakistan](#)
2. [BBC Country Profiles, Pakistan](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, Pakistan](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some differences Qudsia notices about Pakistani culture compared to the US?
2. What was her path to get to the US?
3. What stands out from her recollection of the immigration process?
4. Was Tacoma her first stop in the US? How did she end up here?
5. How does she feel about the idea of leaving her birth country?
6. What does she suggest people consider when they encounter immigrants in the US?
7. What do her patients mean to her in the context of her own history and culture?
8. Does she feel like people understand her country of origin? What does she think they miss?
9. How does she describe others' understanding of her and other women of her faith and/or national origin?
10. How does she try to bring some of her culture to Tacoma?
11. How has her life experience changed her idea of home?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR ANN EVANS IMMIGRANT FROM IRELAND

Ann grew up in County Roscommon, Ireland, and came to Tacoma via New York, Peru, and then Seattle. She and her husband were successful shopkeepers who found Tacoma a beautiful place to live and raise their family.

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, Ireland](#)
2. [BBC Country Profiles, Ireland](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, Ireland](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Did Ann take what she describes as a traditional path in life or career? How was hers different?
2. Where did she first start her life in the US? Has she been here ever since? How did she come to Tacoma?
3. How is her Irish culture different from others she has encountered? What does she remark most about being Irish?
4. What is her business now in Tacoma? Has it always been the same? What changed and why?
5. What does she say about the value of immigrants finding others like themselves? Why?
6. What does she say people do not understand about immigrant history in the US?
7. What does she think the future will be regarding immigration?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR MARISELA FLEITES-LEAR IMMIGRANT FROM CUBA

Marisela was born in Cuba and came to the US to marry her American fiancée. We learn of the importance to her of living by the water, the challenges of navigating cultural clues, and how welcoming she found Tacoma to be from the start.

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, Cuba](#)
2. [BBC Country Profiles, Cuba](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, Cuba](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What happened the year Marisela was born and what effect did that have on her life?
2. Does she have fond memories of her formative years? What did she carry with her from that time to her present life?
3. What positives does she describe from the system under which she grew up? How does she compare that with her life in the US?
4. What were the steps of her immigration? Did she come to the US easily or were there complications? What was the US government's attitude about her immigration?
5. Was she ready and eager to leave Cuba and become an American? What concerns did she have about the move?
6. What about Tacoma makes her comfortable after coming from Cuba?
7. What kinds of things did she have to learn after moving to the US? Had she expected these? To what does she compare that experience?
8. How does she feel current political attitudes affect the understanding of immigrants? How does she feel immigrants should respond? How should Americans respond?



CURRICULUM SHEET FOR SYED JAMAL IMMIGRANT FROM INDIA

Syed came to the US to study but wound up living here instead. He describes being driven by curiosity of Americans and what he has found after exploring that curiosity.

RESOURCES:

1. [Encyclopedia Britannica, India](#)
2. [BBC Country Profile, India](#)
3. [CIA World Factbook, India](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is Syed's hometown like? Is it like his new home? How so?
2. What brought him to the US? Has he stayed since his first arrival? Why or why not?
3. Why did he choose the US? Did he find what he expected?
4. Why did he choose Tacoma? Was it what he expected? Was he prepared? What would he have preferred and why?
5. What is striking to him about the US?
6. How do immigrants fit into his concept and experience of the US? Does that support or contradict his expectations?
7. What does he think people will find if they talk to immigrants? How does that contribute to his US experience? Or to anyone?
8. Did he find an opportunity in the US/Tacoma? Was it the way he expected? What did he learn after moving here?
9. What does he find unique about Tacoma? How does that relate to his experience in the US?