

CHAPTER
26

Section 4

LITERATURE SELECTION **Selected Poems**

In the debate over immigration that has erupted at different times in U.S. history, the personal side of the issue often gets lost or ignored. For most immigrants and their descendants, the American dream doesn't come without a cost. The poems collected here present the human side of the immigrant experience in some of its varied voices.

Immigrants

by Pat Mora

wrap their babies in the American flag,
feed them mashed hot dogs and apple pie,
name them Bill and Daisy,
buy them blonde dolls that blink blue
eyes or a football and tiny cleats
before the baby can even walk,
speak to them in thick English,
 hallo, babee, hallo,
whisper in Spanish or Polish
when the babies sleep, whisper
in a dark parent bed, that dark
parent fear, "Will they like
our boy, our girl, our fine american
boy, our fine american girl?"

Latin Women Pray

by Judith Ortiz Cofer

Latin women pray
In incense sweet churches
They pray in Spanish to an Anglo God
With a Jewish heritage.
And this Great White Father
Imperturbable in his marble pedestal
Looks down upon his brown daughters
Votive candles shining like lust
In his all seeing eyes
Unmoved by their persistent prayers.

Yet year after year
Before his image they kneel
Margarita Josefina Maria and Isabel
All fervently hoping
That if not omnipotent
At least he be bilingual

Mexicans Begin Jogging

by Gary Soto

At the factory I worked
In the fleck of rubber, under the press
Of an oven yellow with flame,
Until the border patrol opened
Their vans and my boss waved for us to run.
"Over the fence, Soto," he shouted,
And I shouted that I was American.
"No time for lies," he said, and pressed
A dollar in my palm, hurrying me
Through the back door.

Since I was on his time, I ran
And became the wag to a short tail of
 Mexicans—
Ran past the amazed crowds that lined
The street and blurred like photographs, in
 rain.
I ran from that industrial road to the soft
Houses where people paled at the turn of an
 autumn sky.
What could I do but yell vivas
To baseball, milkshakes, and those sociologists
Who would clock me
As I jog into the next century
On the power of a great, silly grin.

Modern Secrets

by Shirley Geok-Lin Lim

Last night I dreamt in Chinese.
 Eating Yankee shredded wheat,
 I told it in English terms
 To a friend who spoke
 In monosyllables,
 All of which I understood:
 The dream shrunk
 To its fiction.
 I knew its end
 Many years ago.
 The sallow child
 Eating from a rice-bowl
 Hides in the cupboard
 With the tea-leaves and china.

Saying Yes

by Diana Chang

“Are you Chinese?”
 “Yes.”

“American?”

“Yes.”

“*Really* Chinese?”

“No . . . not quite.”

“*Really* American?”

“Well, actually, you see . . .”

But I would rather say
 yes

Not neither-nor
 not maybe,
 but both, and not only

The homes I’ve had,
 the ways I am

I’d rather say it
 twice,
 yes

Discussion Questions

- Which one of these poems do you like best? Explain your choice.
- What did you learn about the immigrant experience from reading these poems? Point out specific examples in the poems.
- Gary Soto and Diana Chang are both native-born Americans. How do their poems differ in feeling and attitude from the others? How do you explain the difference?