**Lesson 1**

**Title**: Strangers in a Strange Land

**Duration**: 43 min.

**Grade Level/Subject**: Senior AP Literature & Composition

**Central Focus**: The central focus of this lesson is investigating why Jhumpa Lahiri chose to begin her novel, *The Namesake*, where she did. Specifically, students will be able to analyze and express why Lahiri begins the novel with the story of the main character’s parents moving to America, rather than with an important event in the main character’s life, as most stories do. Having read the novel’s opening chapter, students will today reflect and discuss on the perspectives offered in the chapter to come to a conclusion about this structural decision. In addition, this lesson also serves as an introduction to reading *The Namesake*, and thus lays the groundwork for reading and analyzing the remainder of the novel, since Lahiri’s decision to begin this way influences the entire story from this point forward.

**Standard**: IL-ISBE-ELA-CC-2010.11-12.R.L.5. Craft and Structure: Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

**Objective**: After reflective writing and small group discussion, students will be able to analyze the reasoning behind Jhumpa Lahiri’s decision of where to start *The Namesake* with 80% accuracy.

**Assessment:** Students will be assessed in a variety of ways throughout this lesson, both informally and formally. The informal assessments will consist of students turning in their written building responses to how the Gangulis are outsiders in America. Since multiple students will have written on the same paper, there is no way to gauge which student wrote what, and so this assessment will be ungraded and solely for my personal use. In addition, as the students talk throughout the hour, I will move among them both observing and questioning. At the end of class, there will be a whole-class discussion where students present their analysis of Lahiri’s decision to start the novel with Ashoke and Ashima. Both of these activities also will serve as informal assessments. A formal assessment will be assigned in the form of a question via Google Classroom where students will be asked to summarize the reasoning behind Lahiri’s decision and what the students think it means for the novel’s structure and purpose moving forward.

**Diversity of Learners:** There are 23 students in this AP Literature & Composition course. Of those students, the vast majority (19) are white. One student is a black male, and three students are Latinas. There are 12 female students and 11 male students, a nearly even gender split. The vast majority of students are from upper-class or upper-middle class homes, in line with the student body population. There is one struggling reader in this class, who is taking the AP course because it was the only English course available to them with their schedule. Another student had brain surgery to remove a tumor earlier in the school year; because of this, she has missed many school days, and is still only at half-attendance for most of the week. While there is no cognitive decline from the surgery, the sheer amount of missed time and outside stress means she merits special attention. Additionally, there is one boy in the classroom who likely has some form of Autism or Asperger’s but has never been formally tested or diagnosed. He is on the same intellectual level as the rest of the students in the class, but can struggle if directions are not concrete, and sometimes has difficulties with abstract concepts and ideas. As this is an AP classroom, the vast majority of students are talented intellectually; even so, there are one or two students who stand out as particularly gifted among this group.

**Personal/Cultural/Community Connections to Lesson:** Students will be asked at the beginning of the class to write on their times as an outsider in order to foster a personal connection to the Gangulis, who are newly arrived Indian immigrants to America. I included the activity of throwing the paper responses into a box to engage the large number of athletes in the classroom, and to get the class kinesthetically involved, both through throwing and through walking around the room to find paper to write on. This type of interaction typically energizes the students and contributes to a sense of classroom community. As a small, tight-knit private school, the students are very familiar and comfortable with each other, and the one-on-one discussions draw on this familiarity and reinforces the school’s values.

**Adaptations:** Three students need to be borne in mind while planning for adaptations: these students are the struggling reader, the student recovering from brain surgery, and the student with suspected autism. I will take care in pairing the students up that each of these students is paired with a high-achieving reader who can help them address any questions or struggles they may have with the reading or discussion. As the students move around the classroom often in discussions, this is fairly easy to do. I will also make sure to explain the directions in concrete details, and to check in with the student with suspected autism at the beginning of each discussion to make sure he understands what is being asked of him. I will also spend time with the struggling reader and ask guided questions to be sure she understood the reading. If she struggles, her partner will be able to help with examples pulled from the text.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** Students need to have read the 1st chapter of *The Namesake* prior to class. The students should be well versed in analyzing works of literature, including shorter excerpts such as chapters and how they tie into the work as a whole, from previous units throughout the year, where they have studied poems, plays, and novels. Therefore the skills needed for this lesson will be highly familiar to them. While the students may not have background knowledge of Indian culture, the chapter is written in such a way that close reading will illuminate the students, and the students have a great deal of experience with close reading.

**Pre-assessment:** The pre-assessment for this unit comes from observation of the students when previously analyzing literature. From this observation, I believe the students are highly capable of analyzing and interpreting literature both individually and in groups. This level serves as a “base” for this lesson, as the students will be asked to move from this analysis to consider authorial choices concerning structure. The scaffolding for this lesson is intended to support this intellectual movement.

**Academic Language:** The students should be able to analyze the author’s choices surrounding the novel’s structure, using analytical language such as specific textual evidence and abstract thought. This is the focus of the lesson and its learning task.

**Planning Resources:**

1. *The Namesake*
2. Whiteboard
3. Whiteboard markers
4. Google Classroom
5. Laptop
6. Pen/pencil and paper
7. A cardboard box

**Learning Theories:** Two learning theories undergird this lesson. The first is Pearson and Gallagher’s gradual release model. Although the responsibility for this class is wholly student-centered, it builds off of “I do, we do” activities I have done with the students before in terms of analysis. This class period is wholly centered on the “you do” and is structured to assess student ability in terms of independent analysis without a heavy teacher presence. The other theory is Vygotsky’s social constructivism. The class will consist heavily of one-on-one and group discussion, in which the students are bringing to bear that backgrounds, readings, and opinions to formulate their current analysis. That analysis is shaped by the group activities that have been done throughout the year and is further refined through the social discussions during the lesson.

**Introduction:**

1. As the students enter the classroom, I will greet them and tell them to take out their laptops and access Google Classroom. Students need to hear this as soon as they enter the classroom, because the school-issued laptops require about three minutes to boot up and access the Internet.
2. Once the final bell rings, I will instruct the students to answer the following question in Google Classroom, writing for four minutes:
3. I will introduce the lesson by asking the students to write in a Google Classroom question for four minutes on the following topics: Write about a time you were an outsider. What did it feel like? How did you get through it? In what ways was your experience similar to Ashoke and Ashima?
4. This task is designed to help put the students in the mindset of Ashoke and Ashima, who are very much outsiders in the opening chapter, and to help the students make connections between their own lives and the story.
5. During this time I will take attendance.
6. When four minutes has passed, we will move into the official phase of the lesson.

**Step-by-Step Instructional Delivery:**

1. “Keep what you wrote in mind as we think today about the Gangulis in America.”

2. At this time, I will ask the students to write on hardcopy paper one way in which the Gangulis—either Ashoke or Ashima individually, or the couple as a whole—are outsiders in America. The students will be asked to include a quote from the opening chapter and explain how it shows the Gangulis as outsiders.

3. The students will have four minutes to write.

4. Once the students have finished writing, I will take out a small cardboard box and place it on a table at the front of the room.

5. At my instruction, the students will fold their papers and attempt to throw them into the box.

6. Once this is done, students will come forward and find a paper which is not theirs to respond to.

7. The students will respond to what the first person wrote, adding another way—with textual evidence—that the Gangulis are outsiders in America. This way must be different from what they wrote before, and from what is already on the paper. Again, the students will have four minutes.

8. Steps 4-6 will be repeated.

9. Now the students will be asked to write on Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship. What is it like? They will use textual evidence to support their opinion.

10. After four minutes, I will re-gather the class’s attention and we will begin the carousel.

11. I will divide the classroom in half into sitting and standing. Those standing will go to stand by a sitting partner.

12. The students will discuss Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship for three minutes. What do we know about Ashima and how she feels? What do we know about Ashoke and how he feels? What is their life like together?

13. After three minutes, the students will be given one minute to write down their main impressions on a piece of paper. We will then rotate by having the standing students move to a different sitting student.

14. Steps 12-13 will be repeated twice for a total of 8-10 minutes.

15. During this time I will move among the groups to listen and ask questions.

16. After the third carousel rotation, I will ask the students to stay where they were. I will hand out markers to several pairs, and ask one person to go to the board to write something about Ashoke and Ashima. Options to write on include their marriage, their backgrounds, and their current status in America.

17. When the students at the board are finished, I will ask them to give their marker to another student, to write a different detail about Ashoke and Ashima in response.

18. This will occur three times.

19. I will then ask students to summarize what we know about Ashoke and Ashima, encouraging them to use textual evidence and build off one another’s comments.

20. I anticipate this writing and discussion taking around eight minutes.

21. When it is completed, I will ask the students to make one last carousel rotation. Their discussion question with their partner will be: Given what we know about Ashoke and Ashima, and that their son is the main character, why did Lahiri choose to begin the novel here?

22. The students will have five minutes to discuss.

23. A discussion similar to that in step 20 will then take place. This discussion of structure and craft can take as long as it needs to; I would estimate it taking about six minutes, but it will depend on student analysis and behavior.

**Closing:** When the students are finished, I will thank them for a great class period and allow them to complete the Google Classroom question that will be for homework.

**Gearing up and gearing down:** With this kind of kinesthetic activity, classroom management will be important, and it will be necessary to settle the students down after they grab their thrown pieces of paper. This class is fairly good at settling back on task, so I do not anticipate much difficulty here. The carousel discussion will challenge both high-performing and struggling students, as they will discuss with several students at different levels, providing them with different perspectives. Additionally, I will move throughout the classroom during the discussions. For students who appear to be struggling, I will attempt to guide them through questioning. For students who grasp the material quickly, I will encourage them to delve deeper.