

Immigration and Citizenship Vocabulary

Alien A person who comes to a country intending to take up permanent residence

Census A count of a total population

DHS Department of Homeland Security, the federal arm that regulates immigration to the U.S., established March 1, 2003

Diversity lottery A program that makes a number of visas available to people who come from countries with low rates of immigration

Emigration* The process of leaving a country to live elsewhere

Green Card (Alien Registration Receipt Card) Official document that proves an immigrant can reside and work in the U.S. legally

Immigrant A person who comes to a country intending to take up permanent residence

Immigration* The process of people coming to a country with the intention of living there permanently

Literacy test A test of knowledge of U.S. history and government in English

Migration* The movement of people from one region or country to another

Naturalization The legal process of becoming a citizen in a new country

Oath A promise that what you say is true

Preference The priority for admitting groups of immigrants

Quota The number of people from each country who can be admitted annually

Refugees Persons living outside their country of origin to escape danger or persecution

Sponsor A company or an individual who files a petition to sponsor someone to enter the U.S. legally and obtain a Green Card

Undocumented alien An individual who enters the country bypassing the legal process or an individual who purposely overstays the allotted time on a student or visitor visa

USCIS** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an agency of the DHS charged with carrying out the immigration and citizenship laws and regulations; replaced the Immigration and Naturalization Service

Visa The permit that grants non-citizens permission to enter the U.S. as tourists or students

***Know your P's and Q's about the I's and E's and other initials:**

*When you need a word to describe someone leaving his or her native country with no destination stated, use emigrant. You emigrate from a place. (Think of the "e" in emerge, and imagine people emerging from their homelands.)

When you need a word to describe someone arriving on new shores or crossing the borders into a new land, use immigrant. Immigrants have (like the "i" in USCIS) come to a new land, but they could have emigrated from many different countries.

When you intend to include both, or when you mean either, use migration. "He migrated from northern Mexico to South Texas." "Since 1900 Americans have been migrating toward the Southwest." This inclusive term is becoming more popular as people move more and more easily and readily from one part of the world to another.

**The agency formerly known as the INS was an arm of the Department of Justice. With the Homeland Security Act of March 2003, that agency fell under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security, where its name changed to the USCIS.