

Coming to America

The Basics

Time Required

6-7 days

Subject Areas

Middle School US History and Language Arts
Development of Industrial U.S., 1870-1900

Common Core Standards Addressed:

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

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The Lesson

Introduction

Annie Moore arrived in America from Ireland on January 1, 1892; she was the first person to enter the United States through Ellis Island. She was only the first; between 1892 and 1954 more than 12 million people entered the United States through the Ellis Island immigration center. Another way to put it is that except for Native Americans, every person on the North American continent came from someplace else, either as an immigrant herself or as a descendant of immigrants.

This unit will lay a foundation for fifth graders to understand one of the great ages of immigration in American history, the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. This era of immigration differed from others in two ways: scale and source. This was the first time that the largest population of immigrants came from nations in central, eastern and southern Europe. Most of these people were refugees from economic problems, or political and/or religious persecution. This was also a great period of immigration from Asian countries, many of whom came through Angels Island.

Some claim that the large scale of immigration was spurred by technology. For instance the development of ocean-going steamships made it possible for tens of thousands of men, women and children to seek a new life in America. At the same time the rise of American industries and the growth of the railroad created many jobs, which were an inducement for immigrants, seeking a new life.

These three lessons will address why people came to America, what happened when they got here, and an activity for the students to explore where their roots began.

Guiding Questions

- Why have people come to the United States in the past?
- What are the benefits for immigrants and for the country when people from other lands settle here?
- What complications sometimes develop for immigrants and the country?
- How can we look at music, as a way to explain the immigrants' feelings, thoughts, desires?

Learning Objectives

- Describe several reasons why immigrants came to the United States
- To gain an understanding of the difficulties endured on the journey to America
- To become aware of the process of being admitted to the United States
- Demonstrate an understanding of where their ancestors, or ancestors of another trusted adult, came from by preparing and conducting an oral history

Preparation Instructions

Songs used in this lesson:

“Thousands are Sailing to Amerikay”

“Tkh Hob Dikh Lib, Amerike (I Love You, America)”

“Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor”

Lesson Activities

LESSON 1-Coming to America

Objectives:

- Describe several reasons why immigrants came to the United States
- To gain an understanding of the difficulties endured on the journey to America

This first lesson would be the introduction to the great wave of immigration that happened in the United States between 1890 and 1920. To begin the lesson, ask the students if they know where their families immigrated from. To reinforce geography skills put a symbol on the world map to pinpoint these places. After some discussion relate how many of their families came into the U.S. usually through Ellis Island or Angels Island. (Due to the demographics of my school, I will be concentrating on activities that were happening in Ellis Island and in the larger industrial cities.)

DAYS 1 & 2

- Read and discuss pages 6-17 from the book *...If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island* by Ellen Levine (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1993). After reading the following website is a great resource: http://www.ellisland.org/genealogy/ellis_island.asp
- After reading and/or listening to the songs have a discussion asking the students: Who was singing these songs? How do you think the people were feeling about coming to America? What exactly are they hoping to find in America?

DAYS 3 & 4

- Read pages 18-33 in *...If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island*. This part of the book deals with what the journey was like.
- Use the following websites for hands on trips to Ellis Island
<http://www.historychannel.com/ellisland/index2.html>
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/tour/index.htm>
- View the Thomas Edison film clip from 1903 showing a ship arriving at Ellis Island
http://www.americaslibrary.gov/assets/jb/progress/jb_progress_ellis_3.mpg

LESSON 2 Did We Make the Right Choice?

Objective

- To become aware of the process of being admitted to the United States

Once getting to Ellis Island, life was not a land of milk and honey. The ordeals that the immigrants faced on Ellis Island were great. There were inspections by doctors and immigration inspectors. One had to

worry that the lack of money or job prospects could keep them out of the land they were trying to reach. In the song, "A Little Letter to My Father," Solomon Smulewitz's lyrics tell the tale: "*Mother has died in loneliness and poverty. Write a letter to father and send money for him to come to America. Alas, father is too ill to be admitted here. He is permitted to see his son at the gate of Ellis Island, and then will be sent back to Europe.*"

- Read pages 33-59 from *...If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island*.
- Discuss what it was like walking into the Great Hall, all the sights and sounds you might see.
- Have students role-play to experience and understand the feelings of immigrants going through the admittance process at Ellis Island.

Some scenarios:

- a) A husband, wife and daughter are admitted to the country but their two-year-old son's admittance is delayed for further medical examination
- b) A mother and her three children are detained for further questioning and are not allowed to contact the father who is waiting to meet them.
- c) An extended family of mother, father, children and grandparents go through the admittance process. All are admitted to the United States except the father, who is soon to be deported back to Ireland.

LESSON 3 How/When We Came to America

Objective

- Demonstrate an understanding of where their ancestors, or ancestors of another trusted adult, came from by preparing and conducting an oral history

At the beginning of the lesson model for your students an oral history from your family. Either wear or show something that represents your own ancestry and tell the students where your family came from. Then explain to them that they will be doing an oral history about their ancestors. Lead the class in a discussion concerning what type of questions they might ask the person they are interviewing. Some of the questions might be:

1. Who were the first people in my family, or the family of another trusted adult, to come to America?
2. Why did they choose to leave their homeland to come to a foreign country?
3. What did they bring with them?
4. What cultural things do we still do as a family that I might not have been aware of before?
5. Are there any foods that are part of our family history?
6. What are some of the interesting or unusual stories in the family?
7. Where did I get my name?
8. Do I look like any of my ancestors?

After the students have decided whom they are interviewing they need to decide what questions they will be asking in the interview.

For a graded assignment have the students turn in to you the questions they will be asking. Make sure the students understand how to use a tape recorder. You could practice this in class to assess this skill.

After interviewing the students will prepare a presentation. In the presentation the students will take the character of the ancestor and tell what has been learned from the ancestor's point of view.

**The remainder of the book, book *...If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island* (pp.60-80) is about what happens after the Staircase of Separation, either you turn left to the ferry to Manhattan or you go straight

ahead to the detention rooms. The rest of the book also tells what life was like acclimatizing to this new world. **

Extending the Lesson

- Have students post the oral history online at the following link:
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/writing/index.asp?topic=Immigration>
- Prepare a multi-cultural feast with students bringing in food from the “homelands”. This would also be a good time to share songs and/or dances from other countries.
- Have students review pictures and primary sources from the following website:
http://www.jaha.org/edu/discovery_center/push-pull/index.html

Some questions to answer:

Who is in the photograph? What are they doing? Where do you think they live? What kind of conditions do they work in or live in? How did the person who wrote the letter feel about his/her life? What do you think they feel or think about America? What do you think happened to these people?

- Choose one of the people mentioned in the book, ...*If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island*, by and write a journal entry from that person’s point of view
- Have students split into pairs and conduct interviews with one playing the role of a reporter and the other playing the role of a person about whom they have read.
- See accompanying “Letter to My Best Friend” activity
- Use the following link to hear about three different experiences of children from 1920 to present day
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/index.htm>
- Use the graph on page 8 as a model and then use the following web site to make graphs using different immigration facts
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/facts.htm>
- The following link is where the students can search for his/her own families arrival at Ellis Island
<http://www.ellisland.org>
- Use the cartoon on page to start a discussion. Some questions to ask- Who are all the people around the table? What do they represent? How do you think they got here? This was before Ellis Island- where did they land in America? Was the artist happy about all of these people being at the table?

Resources

Lyrics

“Thousands are Sailing to Amerikay”

You brave Irish people wherever you be,
I pray stand a moment and listen to me;
Your sons and fair daughters,
They are going away,
And thousands are sailing to Amerikay.

cho: So good luck to those people
And safe may they land.
They are leaving their country
For a far distant strand.
They are leaving old Ireland,
No longer can stay,

And thousands are sailing to Amerikay.

The night before leaving
They are bidding goodbye,
And it's early next morning
Their hearts give a sigh.
They do kiss their mothers,
And then they will say,
"Goodbye, dearest father,
I am now going away."

Their friends and relations,
And neighbours also,
When the trunks they are packed up
All ready to go,
The tears from their eyes then
Are falling like rain,
And the horses are prancing
Going off for the train.

When they do reach the station
You will hear their last cry,
With handkerchiefs waving
And bidding goodbye,
Their hearts will be breaking
When leaving the shore.
So goodbye, dear old Ireland,
We will ne'er see you no more.

So pity the mother
Who rears up the child
And likewise the father
Who labours and toils.
To try to support them
He works night and day,
And when they are reared
They will go away.

“ IKH HOB DIKH LIB, AMERIKE (I Love You, America)”

Music: Joshua Weisser Words: Yekhezkel Levit

I love you, America,
I love your holy ground;
I love your freedom
And your people,
Who work and who think.
And your flag, which I hold high,
Will always be dear to me.
I will always defend it
And die for it too.
Here there is opportunity

For anyone who has the courage.
You say to your noble children:
"Live freely and grow and accomplish!"
I love you, America,
And I will pray for you,
Heartfully and constantly,
My dear, dear land!

"Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor"
Music by Irving Berlin, Lyrics by Emma Lazarus

Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
Send these the homeless tempest-tossed to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
Send these the homeless tempest-tossed to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

WEBSITES:

- ❖ History of Ellis Island
<http://www.americanparknetwork.com/parkinfo/sl/history/ellis.html>
- ❖ Web quest from the library of congress
http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set1.html
- ❖ Great site for all ages and areas of US history
<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi>
- ❖ Great activities to explore, "Where I Come From" lesson plan.
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=309
- ❖ Wonderful Library of Congress site for Jewish immigration information
<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/>

Children's Literature:

Antin, Mary	<i>The Promised Land</i> (Boston : Houghton Mifflin Company, [1912])
Cashore, Kristen	"Growing & Changing Cities" and "New Problems, New Solutions" in Scott Foresman Social Studies. [Grade 5]
Cruce, Lana	<i>The American Dream: Coming to the US (Volume 3 of Reading Street: Social Studies)</i> Pearson/Scott Foresman
Foley, Donna	<i>Brave Settlers in a Strange Land</i> (Pearson/Scott Foresman)
Hest, Amy	<i>When Jessie Came Across the Sea</i> (Candlewick, 1997)
Riis, Jacob	"How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York" (Kessinger Publishing, 2004),
Woodruff, Elvira	<i>The Orphan of Ellis Island (A Time Travel Adventure)</i> (New York: Scholastic Books, 1997)

