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## The “New” Immigrants and Life in the Tenements

### **Lesson Information**

**Subject:** U.S. History & English Language Arts

**Grade Levels:** 9-12

**Time:** 2-3 55 minute class periods or 1-2 85 minute block(s).

### **Common Core Standard(s)**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1](#)

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9](#)

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4](#)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3](#)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

This [Prezi Presentation](#) may be helpful as you teach this lesson. You could either project to the entire class or provide students with the link.

**Objectives:**

- Students will describe the difference between the “new immigrants” and the “old immigrants” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Students will be able to describe how “new immigrants” lived and worked in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Students will be able to interpret primary source documents to support historical claims and make judgments about the past.

**Essential Questions:** What were some of the challenges immigrants faced living in the cities?

**Teacher background information:** Some 334,203 immigrants arrived in the United States in 1886, the year of the statue’s dedication. A Cuban revolutionary, Jose Marti, wrote: “Irishmen, Poles, Italians, Czechs, Germans freed from tyranny or want--all hail the monument of Liberty because to them it seems to incarnate their own uplifting.”

The immigrants who would catch a glimpse of the statue would mainly come from eastern and southern Europe.

In 1900, 14 percent of the American population was foreign-born, compared to 8 percent a century later. Passports were unnecessary, and the cost of crossing the Atlantic was just \$10 in steerage.

European immigration to the United States significantly increased after the Civil War, reaching 5.2 million in the 1880s then surging to 8.2 million in the first decade of the 20th century. Between 1882 and 1914, approximately 20 million immigrants came to the United States. In 1907 alone, 1.285 million arrived. By 1900, New York City had as many Irish residents as Dublin. It had more Italians than any city outside Rome and more Poles than any city except Warsaw. It had more Jews than any other city in the world and sizeable numbers of Slavs, Lithuanians, Chinese, and Scandinavians.

Unlike earlier immigrants, who mainly came from northern and western Europe, the “new immigrants” came primarily from southern and eastern Europe. Predominantly Catholic and Jewish in religion, the new immigrants came from the Balkans, Italy, Poland, and Russia.

Many of the millions of immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries intended to return to their villages in the Old World. Known as “birds of passage,” many of these eastern and southern European migrants were peasants who had lost their property due to the commercialization of agriculture. They came to America to earn enough money to allow them to return home and purchase a piece of land. As one Slavic steelworker put it: “A good job, save money, work all time, go home, sleep, no spend.” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were few restrictions to immigration because of the need for cheap labor in the era of industrialization.

Many immigrants came to America alone, expecting to rejoin their families in Europe within a few years. From 1907 to 1911, of every hundred Italians who arrived in the United States, 73

returned to the Old Country. For Southern and Eastern Europe as a whole, approximately 44 of every 100 who came returned home.

Some immigrants, however, did not come as “sojourners.” In particular, Jewish immigrants from Russia, fleeing religious persecution, arrived in family groups and intended to stay in the United States from the beginning. (from [Digital History](#))

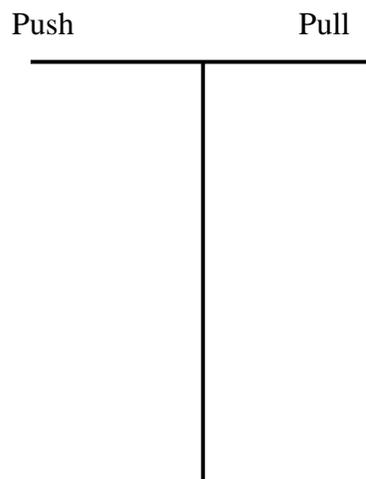
## Day 1

### Check Student’s Prior Knowledge of the topic:

Have students do a think-pair-share “why is America called a nation of immigrants?” Is this an accurate statement? Why or why not?

### Anticipatory Set:

1. Show the class the picture of the Statue of Liberty (**Resource 1**). Ask students to describe what the statute symbolizes. Discuss with students that the statue was a gift from France in celebration of American freedom and democracy. The statue was formally dedicated in 1886.
2. Have the class read the poem “The New Colossus” 1883 by Emma Lazarus (**Resource 2**). For the sake of brevity, have students read only the portion that is featured on the Statue of Liberty. Ask students to interpret Lazarus’s words. What is she saying about those who immigrate to America?
3. Point out that there are “push” and “pull” factors that help to explain why immigrants leave their home country (push factors) and come to a new country (pull factors). Create a T chart and label it Push and Pull, either as individuals or in small groups. Have students brainstorm and complete the chart. You may wish to show the graphic



## Principal Learning Activity(s)

### The New Immigrants

1. Begin the lesson by showing the class the “Godfather Ellis Island” clip (**Resource 3**). In a whole-class discussion, ask the following questions:
  1. Based on your knowledge of the time period, what do you think some of the Push and pull factors brought the “new immigrants” to America?
  2. What do you think was going through the immigrant’s minds when they passed the Statue of Liberty?
  3. Describe the Ellis Island processing center.
  4. How was the boy’s name changed? Why did this happen?
  5. Why did the immigrants undergo a medical examination?
  6. Why was the boy put into isolation?
2. Have students individually or in pairs analyze the editorial cartoon “Welcome to All!” (**Resource 4**). If the students are new to cartoon analysis, they may wish to use the National Archives Cartoon Analysis Worksheet (**Resource 5**).
3. Ask students what this cartoon suggests about America’s relationship with immigrants in the 1880s? How do they know? Have students cite evidence to support their conclusions.
4. Have students read the excerpt from Mary Antin’s “The Promised Land” 1912 (**Resource 6**). Explain that the autobiography tells the story of Antin’s early life in Belarus and her immigration to the United States in 1894. The book focuses on her attempts to assimilate into the culture of the United States
5. In a whole-class discussion, source the document by asking students
  - Who wrote this?
  - What is the author’s perspective?
  - Why was it written?
  - When was it written?
  - Where was it written?
  - Is this source reliable? Why? Why not?
6. In a whole-class discussion display, the chart “Race of immigrant aliens admitted to the USA, 1899-1924” (**Resource 7**)
  1. Ask students to identify how the “new” immigrants of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries differed from the “old” immigrants of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century?
  2. How do you think they were received? (tell students that between 1890 and 1924, roughly 20,564,000 immigrants came to America. Unlike the “old” immigration

waves of the early 19th century, which generally came from Western Europe to include England, Ireland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, the “new” immigrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe. In this period, it is estimated that 4 million Italian immigrants entered the United States. Many of them passed through the processing center at Ellis Island just outside of New York City; Ellis Island would become a symbol of immigration during these decades. This generation of Italian immigrants hailed from rural and less developed areas of Italy and performed unskilled labor. Like the Irish before them, Italians became scapegoats for economic difficulties as jobs became harder to find. Nativist elements blamed them for everything from domestic radicalism to organized crime. Italians living and working in towns and cities across the United States were subject to physical attacks by anti-immigrant mobs and domestic terrorist groups like the KKK.

7. Explain to students that many White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS) did not like the influx of new immigrants coming from Eastern and Southern Europe, sometimes called nativists. WASPS took action to limit the number of immigrants coming to America. One such group was the Immigration Restriction League. Some did not like the immigrants because they were seen as economic competition. They were willing to do unskilled labor at lower wages than natives were willing to work. Others were intolerant that many of the new immigrants were of the Jewish and Roman Catholic faith.

Nativism, in general, refers to a policy or belief that protects or favors the interest of the native population of a country over the interests of immigrants. In the United States, the greatest nativist sentiment coincided with the great waves of 19th-century European immigration on the East Coast and, to a lesser extent, with Chinese immigrants on the West Coast.

Nineteenth-century nativism in the United States contained an intense anti-Catholic strain since many newly arrived immigrants hailed from predominantly Roman Catholic countries. Although both religion and ethnicity helped identify targets of nativist bias, its motivations were often economic. The large waves of immigrants, many of whom were skilled tradesmen, provided a large pool of inexpensive labor that threatened the well-being of native artisans and other workers.

The most prominent American nativist organization of the 19th century was the Know-Nothing party, which flourished originally in the 1840s and experienced a revival in the 1880s. The Ku Klux Klan was also notable for its nativist sentiment.

8. Display the Political cartoon “Where the Blame Lies,” April 4, 1891. (**Resource 8**) Ask students to interpret the editorial bias of the cartoon. What is their evidence? What are

some of the symbols used? Why are the symbols effective? What is the author's point of view regarding immigrants? How do you know? Who might agree with this editorial cartoon?

## Day 2

### Life in the Tenements

1. Explain that many immigrants who came to New York did not have much money, literally bringing only what they could carry with them. As a result, many immigrants settled in Manhattan's lower east side, such as in neighborhoods like Mulberry Street. Show the class the image "Mulberry Street, New York City" (**Resource 9**)
2. In a whole-class discussion, ask students the following questions:
  - What might it have been like to live in a neighborhood like the one shown?
  - What were some of the opportunities living on Mulberry Street?
  - What were some of the challenges people faced living there?
3. Explain that most immigrants lived in tenement buildings, which is a kind of apartment. Either as a class or individually, have students take a "virtual field trip" to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (**Resource 10**). If technology permits, show students Mulberry Street and the Lower East Side using Google Maps.
4. Individually have students read "Life in the Tenements of New York City (1890)" by Jacob Riis (**Handout 1**). In a whole group discussion, ask the following questions:
  - What does the investigation by Riis regarding children in tenements reveal?
  - How does Riis describe the tenement building?
  - What are some of the dangers of tenements?
  - What happens to children?
  - What kills people in tenements?
5. Present the following images to the class
  - a. Bandit's Roost 1890 by Jacob Riis (**Resource 11**),
  - b. "In the Italian Quarter-On Mulberry Street on a Winter Evening." (**Resource 12**).
6. Have students analyze the documents for content and determine additional difficulties faced by immigrants.

### Assessment:

1. Have students pretend that they are recent immigrants who have come to America and live in an urban tenement. Have them create an "Immigrant Survival Manual" to explain what it is like living and working in America. Be sure to have students include details taken from the various primary sources discussed in the lesson. Some topics to be addressed:
  - a. Life in the tenements

- b. Working life
- c. Nativism

Manuel may be written or electronic media such as a “mini documentary,” brochure, Google Slides, or Prezi presentation.

**Extend the lesson:**

1. Have students research WW1 era immigration to include the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924. Why was this legislation passed? What was it designed to do? What were the outcomes of the legislation?

**Inquiry ARC based upon the C3 Framework**

1. Developing questions and plan investigations. Some suggestions for research may include:
  - a. What was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and how did it change immigration policy?
  - b. What is the process of Naturalization? Is this a fair approach for all that want to become naturalized citizens?
  - c. What is the DACA program, and why was it implemented?
  - d. What are some of the issues that are taking place on America’s borders? Is the country embracing the right policy?
2. Apply disciplinary concepts and tools
  - a. Students will apply the historical thinking concept of change and continuity over time to examine this enduring problem stated in step #1.
3. Gather, evaluate, and use evidence.
  - a. Students will research primary and secondary sources, assess their significance, and determine if the sources are reliable and credible to build their arguments concerning their topic of research.
4. Communicate conclusions and take informed action
  - a. Students could propose federal legislation to address the immigration issue they researched.
  - b. Students could write a letter to their members of Congress offering their opinions based upon their research.
  - c. Students could write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper, news website, or blog concerning their research results.

## Online Resource List:

**Resource 1:** Statute of Liberty New York Harbor, created between 1900-1910 Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/det1994017586/PP/>

**Resource 2:** Emma Lazarus “The New Colossus” 1883  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/liberty/lazarus.html>

**Resource 3** “Godfather Ellis Island” movie clip from the movie Godfather Part II (1974)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrdwdZG22\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrdwdZG22_I)

**Resource 4** “Welcome to All!” Uncle Sam on “U.S. Ark of Refuge” welcoming immigrants, with cloud “War” over them. Puck, vol. VII (1880 April 28), p. 130-131.  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002719044/>

**Resource 5** “Cartoon Analysis Worksheet” National Archives  
[https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon\\_analysis\\_worksheet\\_former.pdf](https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon_analysis_worksheet_former.pdf)

**Resource 6** “The Promised Land” 1912 by Mary Antin  
[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20885/20885-h/20885-h.htm#CHAPTER\\_IX](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20885/20885-h/20885-h.htm#CHAPTER_IX)

**Resource 7** “Race of immigrant aliens admitted to the USA, 1899-1924”  
<http://udel.edu/~ehiggin/soci215/1899imm.htm>

**Resource 8** “Where the Blame Lies,” Sackett and Wilhelms Litho. Co., April 4, 1891.  
[http://explorepahistory.com/kora/files/1/2/1-2-D2A-25-ExplorePAHistory-a0j8h6-a\\_349.jpg](http://explorepahistory.com/kora/files/1/2/1-2-D2A-25-ExplorePAHistory-a0j8h6-a_349.jpg)

**Resource 9** “Mulberry Street, New York” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3g04637/>

**Resource 10** Lower East Side Tenement Museum Virtual Tour  
[http://www.tenement.org/Virtual-Tour/index\\_virtual.html?gclid=CIuq\\_ZPam7YCFskpPAodpzsAzQ](http://www.tenement.org/Virtual-Tour/index_virtual.html?gclid=CIuq_ZPam7YCFskpPAodpzsAzQ)

**Resource 11** “Bandits Roost” 1890 photograph by Jacob [www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/riis-and-reform.html#obj018](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/riis-and-reform.html#obj018)

**Resource 12** “In the Italian Quarter-On Mulberry Street on a Winter Evening.”  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94507778/>

## Other Sources

Higham, John, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (1988)

Michaels, Walter B., *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism* (1997)

Perea, Juan F., ed., *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States* (1996).

## Handout 1



### Jacob Riis describes life in the Tenements (1890)

During urban migration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, slums developed in every major city. Although many cities instituted housing codes and built sanitation facilities, many poor neighborhoods remained crowded and dirty. Epidemics of diseases like typhoid, smallpox, & tuberculosis were routine. In his writings and photographs of New York's Lower East Side, Danish immigrant **Jacob Riis** told millions of Americans of the problems of urban poverty. His book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) prompted laws to improve tenement living

conditions.

1888 photo by Riis "Baby's Playground."

"The statement once made a sensation that between 70 and 80 children had been found in one tenement. It no longer excites even passing attention when the sanitary police report counting 101 adults and 91 children in a Crosby Street house. The children in another numbered 89, a total of 180 for two joined tenements!

As we stroll from one narrow street to another, the odd contrast between the low, old-looking houses in front and the towering tenements in the backyards grows even more striking,

Suppose we look into one? Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark, and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there. Not that it would hurt them; kicks and cuffs are their daily diet. They have little else. Here where the hall turns and dives into utter darkness, is a step, and another, another. A flight of stairs. You can feel your way if you cannot see it. ...All the fresh air that ever enters these stairs comes from the hall door that is forever slamming and from the windows of dark bedrooms ...That was a woman filling her pail by the hydrant you just bumped against. The sinks are in the hallway that all the tenants may have access to – and all be poisoned alike by their summer stench. In summer, when 1000 thirsty throats pant for a cooling drink, it is worked in vain. But the saloon, whose open door you passed in the hall, is always there. The smell of it has followed you up....

Come over here. Step carefully over this baby – it is a baby, spite of its rags and dirt – under these iron bridges called fire-escapes, but loaded down, despite the incessant watchfulness of the firemen, with broken household goods, with washtubs and barrels, over which no man could climb from a fire. This gap between dingy brick-walls is the yard. That strip of smoke-colored sky up there is the heaven of these people. That baby's parents live in the rear tenement here. She

is at least as clean as the steps we are now climbing. The tenement is much like the one in front we just left, only fouler, closer, darker –

Sometimes I have doubted that anybody knows just how many children there are about. Bodies of drowned children turn up in the rivers right along with sin summer, whom no one seems to know anything about. When last spring some workmen, while moving a pile of lumber on a North River pier, found under the previous plank the body of a little lad crushed to death, no one had missed a boy, though his parents afterward turned up.

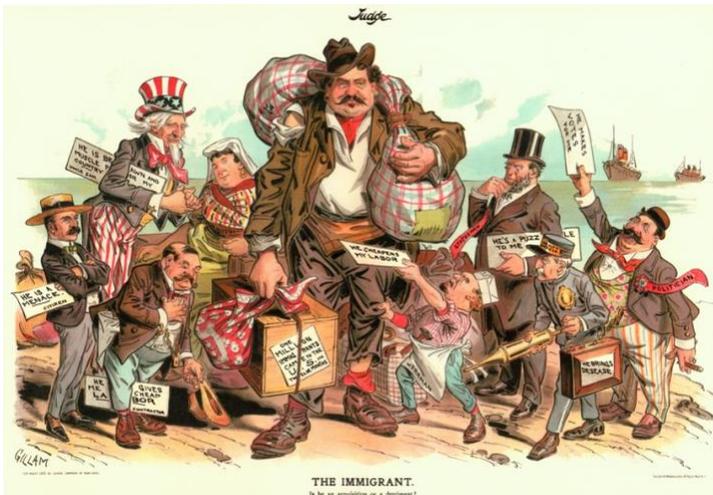
Drop a case of scarlet fever, of measles, or diphtheria into one of these barracks, and, unless it is caught at the very start and stamped out, the contagion of the one case will sweep block after block, and half people a graveyard....”

## The “New Immigrants” and Life in the Tenements Multiple Choice Quiz



**Source:** The Battle with the Slum, MacMillan, 1902 (adapted)

1. Whose work most influenced state and local governments to address the conditions shown in this photograph?
  - A) John Muir
  - B) Frank Norris
  - C) Ida Tarbell
  - D) Jacob Riis



**Source:** Victor Gillam, Judge, September 19, 1903

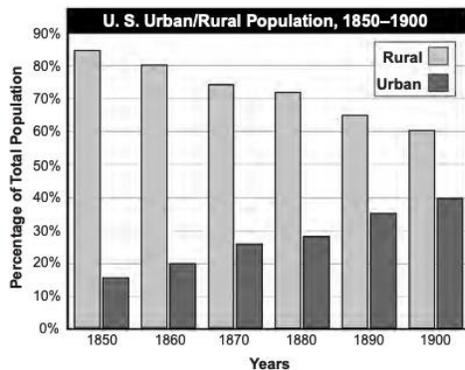
2. Which statement most accurately represents the point of view depicted in this 1903 cartoon?
  - A) Literacy tests are needed to limit immigration to the United States.
  - B) Americans significantly disagree over immigration policy.
  - C) The nation’s economy depends on continuing large-scale immigration.
  - D) Nativist opposition to immigration is declining.

2. Between 1865 and 1900, how did the growth of industry affect American society?
- A) Trade with other nations declined.
  - B) Business leaders called for lower tariffs.
  - C) The urban population increased.
  - D) Corporations supported the growth of labor unions.



Source: Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890

3. One reason Jacob Riis published many photographs similar to this was to
- A) disprove claims of yellow journalists
  - B) encourage government assistance for poor farmers
  - C) promote the use of child labor
  - D) increase public concern over tenement conditions
4. Few restrictions were placed on immigration to the United States in the late 19th century primarily because immigrants
- A) would work for low wages
  - B) provided a rich source of investment capital
  - C) would add to the diversity of the population
  - D) faced little opposition from citizens



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

5. What was the primary cause of the trends shown on the graph?
  - A) closing of the western frontier
  - B) industrialization in the North and the Midwest
  - C) passage of the Homestead Act
  - D) completion of the transcontinental railroad
  
6. A major cause of antagonism toward the “new immigrants” who came to the United States after 1880 was the belief that they
  - A) were better educated than native-born Americans
  - B) had a higher standard of living than most Americans
  - C) adapted easily to American culture
  - D) competed with Americans for jobs as unskilled laborers

“Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she With silent lips. “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-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” — Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” 1883

7. Which attitude about immigration is reflected in this poem, which is inscribed on the Statue of Liberty?
  - A) People from all nations should be welcomed.
  - B) Educated professionals should be given preference.
  - C) Quotas should be adopted to limit certain ethnic groups.
  - D) The influx of unskilled people should be restricted.
  
8. Which statement best expresses a common belief among nativists in the late 1800s and early 1900s?
  - A) “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.”
  - B) “The streets are paved with gold.”
  - C) “All immigrants strengthen America.”
  - D) “America is for Americans.”
  
9. During the 1850s, Irish immigrants were often discriminated against because they
  - A) refused to participate in local politics
  - B) displaced slave labor in the South
  - C) arrived in the United States with great wealth
  - D) practiced the Roman Catholic religion

**The “New Immigrants” and Life in the Tenements Multiple Choice  
Answer Key**

1. D
2. C
3. C
4. D
5. A
6. B
7. D
8. A
9. D
10. D