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The “Old ” Immigrants: The Germans and the Irish

Lesson Information

Subject: US History & English Language Arts

Grade Levels: 9-12

Time: 2-3 55-minute class periods

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 clarifies the relationships among the key details and ideas.

- Evaluate authors’ differing views on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, and in words) 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.

- *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*
- *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.*

Objectives

- Students will be able to the factors that contributed to nativism in the mid 19th Century.
- Students will be able to describe how immigrants contributed to the building of America.
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Driving Question: How were immigrants treated in the 19th Century?

Check Student’s Prior Knowledge: Have students think-pair-share what they know about immigration in the 19th Century.

Anticipatory Set: Ask students to think about the difficulties immigrants may have encountered immigrating to America in the early 18th Century. Have them do the same for Immigrants coming to America today. What shared experiences do you think the two groups had? How were their experiences different?

Principal Learning Activity(s)

Day 1: The Old Immigrants

The Old Immigrants: Explain that the “old immigrants” were settlers from the Country's founding through the middle of the 19th Century. These settlers came to the Americas mostly from western and northern Europe, including England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Generally speaking, the old immigrants practiced Protestant Christianity (except some Germans and Irish who were Roman Catholic). Most shared similar physical characteristics with Americans of English ancestry. As a result, after a few generations, it was easier to assimilate into the dominant culture. In addition, most old immigrants were familiar with democratic styles of government facilitating “Americanization.”

The Germans

1. Display the following quote, do not reveal the author or the group for which the author is commenting:

“Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their Nation...and as few of the English understand their Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain...Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it...I remember when they modestly declined intermeddling in our Elections, but now they come in droves, and carry all before them, except in one or two Counties...In short, unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other colonies, as you very judiciously propose, they will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not in My Opinion be able to preserve our language, and even our Government will become precarious.”

2. In a whole-class discussion, ask:
 - Who wrote this, and for what purpose?
 - What are the author’s significant fears?
 - Why do you think the author feels this way?

Explain that Benjamin Franklin wrote the passage in response to the influx of German Immigrants to Pennsylvania in 1753.

German immigration

From the 1820s to the 1840s, Germans were the second largest group of immigrants to the United States after the Irish. They came to the United States seeking political and religious freedom and greater economic opportunities than could be found in Europe. In 1848, when revolutions erupted in the German states of Europe, Germans became the largest immigrant group to the United States. These German immigrants were known as 48ers.

Although Germans created settlements in nearly every state of the Union, the so-called German belt stretches from Pennsylvania to Oregon, all along the North and Midwest. Many of the Germans who settled these areas were farmers who developed innovative techniques such as crop rotation and soil conservation. Other Germans settled in metropolitan areas, pursuing education, establishing industrial enterprises, and entering the ranks of the middle and upper classes. Today, over 50 million Americans have full or partial German ancestry, making German-Americans the most prominent white ethnic group in the United States.

The Irish

Beginning in the 1840s, the great potato famine touched off a mass migration from Ireland to America. The disaster eliminated the sole subsistence of millions of peasants, resulting in starvation that swept throughout the land. Untold thousands perished, and the survivors, destitute of hope, wished only to get away.

For many, the only mode of escape was emigration. Starving families faced few alternatives but to leave their country in hopes of a better future in America. Consequently, the number of Irish who entered the US between 1820 and 1830 skyrocketed, numbering nearly 2 million souls. The flow persisted for another five years, as earlier immigrants began to send for relatives and friends. Altogether, almost 3.5 million Irishmen entered the US between 1820 and 1880.

Poor Irish arrived without resources or capital to start farms or businesses, as were more affluent immigrants. Fortunately, the expansion of the American economy due to industrialization created heavy demands for unskilled labor in America's factories and construction sites. The Irish played a significant role in digging the great canals, which were the first links in the national transportation system. In addition, the Irish helped lay thousands of miles of rail, contributing to the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. With bulldozers far in the future, the pick and the shovel were the earth-moving technology of the day, and the Irish laborers were the mainstay of the construction gangs that did this grueling work.

Recent Irish immigrants, especially Irish Catholics, were frequent targets of xenophobic—anti-foreign—prejudice. The arrival of so many Irish Catholics almost doubled the overall number of Catholics living in the United States. **Anti-Catholic bigotry** was still prevalent at this time, and many Americans perpetuated stereotypes of Catholics as superstitious and blindly obedient to the Vatican in Rome. Many questioned the loyalty of Catholic immigrants to the United States, fearing that their loyalty would be not to their Country but the Pope in time of war. Catholicism was viewed as a threat to democracy, and many feared that it would undermine the strength of Protestantism in the United States. Despite these challenges, the Irish were resilient and assimilated effectively into US culture and society. They lived in rural and urban areas, settling the western frontier, working the land as farmers, and establishing a major presence in cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. They built powerful political machines in major

metropolitan areas, the most famous of which was undoubtedly **Tammany Hall** in New York City. These political machines, typically run by the Democratic Party, helped recent immigrants assimilate into American society by providing them with training, employment opportunities, and sometimes even cash handouts in exchange for their votes at election time. **William “Boss” Tweed**, fourth-generation Scottish-Irish, was the most infamous of the Tammany Hall political bosses; he dominated the politics of New York City from the mid-1850s until his arrest in 1871 on charges of embezzlement, corruption, and fraud. Though Tweed was undoubtedly guilty of these charges, there is no doubt that Tammany Hall and other political machines like it performed a valuable service in helping recent immigrants, predominantly the Irish, to assimilate into US culture and society. By the mid-20th Century, the Irish had become one of the most successful, prosperous, and well-educated immigrant groups in the Country ([Khan Academy](#)).

3. Show students the video Two Centuries of US Immigration <http://metrocosm.com/animated-immigration-map/>
Have students pay attention to the years of immigration and immigration top countries. Show students the US Immigration Flows by County Chart (**Resource 1**) and discuss the various waves of immigrants to America and how immigration has changed over time.
4. 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).



5. Play the song “The Hands that Built America” by U2 (**Resource 2**) display the lyrics so students can follow along (**Resource 3**). Explain that U2 is an Irish band and that “The Hands That Built America” is a song about the experience of nineteenth-century Irish migrants to New York and their contribution to building America.

Ask students the following questions:

What were some of the “push” and “pull” factors of immigration?
In what way were the Irish the hands that built America?

How did they build America?

What other immigrant groups helped build America past and present? How?

Day 2 Xenophobia

6. Display the political cartoon Uncle Sam's longing house (**Resource 4**), US Xenophobia: Irish and German immigrants stealing ballot box (**Resource 5**) and To Save Trouble no Irish Need Apply." (**Resource 6**)
 - Either individually or in pairs, have students interpret the political cartoon. If new to political cartoon analysis, you may wish to use the [Analyze a Cartoon](#) form provided by the National Archives.
 - What are some of the symbols and words the editorial cartoonists use to communicate their messages?
 - Who might have created these political cartoons, and for what purpose?
 - Why might some Americans believe that the Germans and the Irish tried to "steal the election"?

Explain that American resentment to Irish immigration began to build, and as a result, nativists founded The American Party, or as it was commonly known, the Know-Nothings. They were called "Know-Nothings" because the founding leaders kept their purposes secret and always answered, "I know nothing," when questioned about their intentions. By 1854 the anti-immigrant group gained immensely in the north. They played on the nativist fears of foreigners to gain their influence. They believed that German and Irish Catholics would give their allegiance to Rome and the Pope rather than the US.

7. Display the editorial cartoon "The Propagation Society. More Free Than Welcome (1855)" (**Resource 7**), An anti-Catholic cartoon reflecting the nativist perception of the threat posed by the Roman Church's influence in the United States through Irish immigration and Catholic education. The "Propagation Society" is probably the Catholic proselytizing organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. At right, on a shore marked "The United States," Brother Jonathan, whittling, leans against a flagpole flying the stars and stripes. "Young America," a boy in a short coat and striped trousers, stands at left, holding out a Bible toward Pope Pius IX, who steps ashore from a boat at left. The latter holds a sword aloft in one hand and a cross in the other. Still in the boat are five bishops. One holds the boat to the shore with a crozier hooked around a shamrock plant.
8. Select several readers to read the dialogue aloud (**Handout 1**). For added impact, you may wish to have them "act" it out as well.
9. In a whole group discussion, ask students the following questions:

What is the meaning of this cartoon? How do we know? (have students cite evidence based on the cartoon)

What are some of the symbols used, what do they mean?

Who might have drawn this cartoon, and for what purpose, how do you know?

10. Have students get into small groups, distribute to each group the Know-Nothing Party Platform 1856 (**Handout 2**) working together, have students answer the following questions, groups must answer in consensus, if a member of the group has a different point of view, make sure that member has an opportunity to voice their position.

- Why do you think the authors included plank #5 in their platform? (pay attention to the date)
- According to plank #8, why didn't nativists want immigrants to vote or hold elected office?
- What is the significance of Plank #10?
- In what section of the Country was the American party strongest? Why do you think that?

11. Have students read the Theodore Roosevelt speech "Hyphenated Americanism" (**Handout 3**) and examine the political cartoon The Hyphenated American (**Resource 8**)

- In small groups, have students discuss the arguments that Roosevelt and the political cartoonist are making.
- Do you agree or disagree with their point of view? Why or why not?

Show students the image by Barbara Kelley (**Resource 9**). Explain to students that The melting pot metaphor arose in the eighteenth century, sometimes appearing as the "smelting pot" or "crucible," It described the fusion of various religious sects, nationalities, and ethnic groups into one distinct people: *Ex Pluribus Unum*. In 1782, French immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote that in America, "individuals of all nations are *melted* into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."

Starting in the Sixties, however, another vision of American pluralism arose, captured in the salad bowl metaphor. Rather than assimilating, different ethnic groups would now coexist in their separate identities like the ingredients in a salad, bound together only by the "dressing" of law and the market. This view expresses the ideology of multiculturalism, which goes far beyond the demand that ethnic differences be acknowledged rather than disparaged (Hoover.org).

12. In whole-class discussions or small groups, have students brainstorm the arguments for and against the melting pot and the salad bar theory of assimilation.

Formative Assessment: Have students take the formative assessment quiz to check for understanding.

Summative Performance Task: Assign students one of the following roles: White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) unskilled laborer, Methodist minister (or other Protestant clergies), WASP homemaker, Tammany Hall political boss, urban small business owner, railroad construction boss, union boss, Catholic priest, US army general, factory owner. Have students write a one-page “letter to the editor” (you may have to explain what this is) in reaction to immigration from the point of view of their character. Have students create names, locations, background information, etc. (but must be historically accurate). Have students take turns reciting their letters to the class, be sure to include samples from both the pro and anti-immigrant point of view. After all of the letters have been read, ask the class why many Americans resent the arrival of the Germans and Irish in the 19th Century? What were their contributions?

Extend the lesson: Have students research current immigration legislation. What are the major arguments for and against the proposed immigration policy? What is their point of view concerning immigration? Students can report their findings using a three-panel exhibit board, Prezi, short video, or website.

Resource List:

Resource 1 US Immigration Flows by Country <http://i1.wp.com/metrocosm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/usa-immigration-flows.png>

Resource 2 “The Hands that Built America” from the album Best of 1990-2000 by U2 released in November 2002 by Island records. Video can be accessed https://youtu.be/sj15WP_tUoo

Resource 3 “The Hands that Built America” from the album Best of 1990-2000 by U2 released in November 2002 by Island records. Lyrics can be accessed at http://www.lyricsfreak.com/u/u2/the+hands+that+built+america_20216529.html

Resource 4 Uncle Sam’s Lodging House
http://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/unclesamlodginghousecover2.jpg

Resource 5 “US Xenophobia: Irish and German immigrants stealing ballot box,” *Young American Republic*, accessed May 9, 2021, <http://projects.leadr.msu.edu/youngamerica/items/show/335>.

Resource 6 “To save trouble no Irish need apply” *The Evening Post*, New York City, New York 8 September 1828, p.3
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e4/%22To_save_trouble_no_Irish_need_apply%22_The_Evening_Post%2C_New_York_City%2C_New_York_8_September_1828%2Cp.3.jpg

Resource 7 “The Propagation Society. More Free Than Welcome” (1855)
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a31382>

Resources 8 The Hyphenated American. *Puck Magazine* August 9, 1899.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b9/Hyphenated_Americans_Voting_Cartoon_1899.jpg

Resource 9 Illustration by Barbara Kelley <https://www.hoover.org/research/americas-problem-assimilation>

Handout 1

Transcript of Propagation Society More Free Than Welcome (1855)

Pope: “My friend, we have concluded to take charge of your spiritual welfare, and your temporal estate, so that you need not be troubled with the care of them in future; we will say your prayers and spend your money, while you live, and bury you in the Potters Field when you die. Kneel then! and kiss our big toe in token of submission.”

Brother Jonathan: “No, you don't, Mr. Pope! you're altogether too willing, but you can't put 'the mark of the Beast' on Americans.”

Young America: “You can neither coax nor frighten our boys, Sir! we can take care of our worldly affairs and are determined to “Know nothing” but this book, to guide us in spiritual things.” (“Know nothing” is a “double entendre,” alluding also to the nativist political party of the same name.)

First bishop: “I cannot bear to see that boy, with that horrible book.”

Second bishop: “Only let us get a good foothold on the soil, and we'll burn up those Books and elevate this Country to the Same degree of happiness and prosperity, to which we have brought Italy, Spain, Ireland, and many other lands.”

Third bishop: “Sovereign Pontiff! says that if his friends have any money when he dies, they may purchase a hole, for him in my cemetery, at a fair price.”

Fourth bishop: “Go ahead, Reverend Father; I'll hold our boat by this sprig of shamrock.”

Handout 2

The Know-Nothing Platform 1856

- (1) Repeal of all Naturalization Laws.
- (2) None but Americans for office.
- (3) A pure American Common School system.
- (4) War to the hilt, on political Romanism.
- (5) Opposition to the formation of Military Companies, composed of Foreigners.
- (6) The advocacy of a sound, healthy and safe Nationality.
- (7) Hostility to all Papal influences, when brought to bear against the Republic.
- (8) American Constitutions & American sentiments.
- (9) More stringent & effective Emigration Laws.
- (10) The amplest protection to Protestant Interests.
- (11) The doctrines of the revered Washington.
- (12) The sending back of all foreign paupers.
- (13) Formation of societies to protect American interests.
- (14) Eternal enmity to all those who attempt to carry out the principles of a foreign Church or State.
- (15) Our Country, our whole Country, and nothing but our Country.
- (16) Finally, -American Laws, and American legislation; and death to all foreign influences, whether in high places or low!

Handout 3

Theodore Roosevelt Speaking to the Knights of Columbus on Columbus Day 1915

“There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all ... The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic ... There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.”

The Old Immigrants: The Germans and Irish Quiz

What is one primary reason an increasing number of emigrants left Europe for the United States between 1840 and 1860?

- a. Factory life in eastern American cities appealed to traditional European peasant values.
- b. Industrialization in Europe enhanced the jobs of many craft workers.
- c. Steamships and railroads were replaced by more efficient travel technologies.
- d. The Irish potato famine created many refugees who were escaping starvation.

(d is the correct answer)

Which statement is true about Irish immigrants to the United States between 1840 and 1860?

- a. They worked exclusively as railroad builders.
- b. Most competed with native-born white Americans for low-wage unskilled jobs.
- c. About half of them lived in the Northeast.
- d. Many lived in urban ghetto neighborhoods where crime and disease rates were high.

(d is the correct answer)

German immigrants

- a. sought to assimilate rapidly into American culture.
- b. quickly abandoned the German language.
- c. often became craftsmen, shopkeepers, and farmers.
- d. included fewer skilled craftsmen than the Irish.

(c is the correct answer)

Nativists

- a. blamed immigrants for civil unrest following the Civil War.
- b. accused immigrants of undercutting native-born unskilled laborers.
- c. believed that Protestantism threatened American institutions and American freedom.
- d. stereotyped the Irish as childlike, lazy, heavy drinkers who were unsuited for republican freedom.

(d is the correct answer)

The political party that discriminated against immigrants, particularly those that practiced the Catholic faith.

- a. Know-Nothings
- b. Democrats
- c. Republicans
- d. Bull Moose

(a is the correct answer)