



Lesson Plans

This unit explores immigration to the United States, with an emphasis on the latter half of the 19th century. Because such time concepts typically are not meaningful for children, for the purposes of the unit we often refer to historic times as “long ago”. The unit’s first lesson uses a popular children’s feature cartoon, **Fievel, an American Tail**, to introduce the concept of immigration. The lessons then focus on who, what, when, where, why and how people immigrated. This format guides students through the unit content, and introduces them to one of the most important building blocks in historical inquiry -- systematic questioning using a who, what, when, where, why format.

Like all the Bringing History Home units, this one introduces or examines themes that appear in other units. Immigration provides an opportunity for classes to explore issues such as friendship, discrimination, and personal and cultural differences among people. These themes will recur in the third grade Segregation unit and in the fifth grade WW II Home Front and Native American units. The immigration experience specifically will appear again in the 4th grade Progressive era unit, in which students learn about popular and government responses to the problems in turn of the 19th/20th century factories and tenement slums.

Many, many resources are available on immigration. Enjoy exploring them! The picture book selection is exceptionally broad and deep. Web sites are often interactive and some offer resources and formatting to research family history. While such activities may lie beyond the scope of your class, the resources reflect a widespread interest in U.S. immigration history and offer many opportunities to enrich your students’ knowledge.

In recent decades, melting pot imagery was used to describe the immigrant experience in the U.S. The tapestry-of-cultures concept, however, has now largely replaced melting pot imagery. The tapestry concept honors ethnic differences among citizens and acknowledges the United States’ unique potential as a nation where citizens may share and exchange widely varying traits and values, without abandoning cultural traditions. The concluding festival for the unit reflects this by celebrating students’ varied ethnic heritages. The festival offers students a chance to share their cultural backgrounds, and introduces children to U.S. immigration as a multi-directional cultural exchange.

Before Beginning the unit, please read [Teaching Immigration History](#).



Introductory Activity: The First Americans

Resources:

- ❖ <http://www.ancestrybydna.com/largeMap.html>
- ❖ **Right Here on this Spot** (Clapp, J. & Addy, S.H., 1999. Houghton Mifflin Co.)

We begin this unit with an introduction to pre-historic human migrations. From the scientific fields of archaeology and DNA analysis, there is strong evidence all human beings descend from central African ancestors. Early migrations out of Africa have been dated at around 75,000 years ago. Over the course of at least 60,000 years, the migrations continued until human beings dwelled all across the earth, with the exception of Antarctica. By discussing with your students the concept we all originated from common ancestors, probably in the heart of Africa, you create an inclusive world vision from which to begin exploring the more specific migrations/immigrations to the United States.

- ❖ The Ancestry by DNA world map provides an excellent visual representation of the migration routes, and includes notations about the dates various continents were settled. You may wish to blow-up and print this map to share with your students. After you examine with your class the many arrows on the map depicting the spread of peoples, narrow your focus to the earliest residents in the area now the United States. The ancestors of Native American peoples are believed to have migrated into the Western Hemisphere from Asia, across the Bering Straits. Researchers believe this process began between 18,000 and 30,000 years ago, and continued up until approximately 6,000 years ago. This great migration took place on foot and perhaps by boat.
- ❖ European peoples, who originally migrated into Europe from the Middle East and Asia around 60,000 years ago, did not reach the Western Hemisphere until 1492. Read aloud **Right Here on this Spot** to help children understand Native American peoples almost certainly were the original families in your area.
- ❖ Finally, prepare students for the unit's immigration focus by explaining you will be studying the movement of peoples into this country after it became the United States, during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Activity 1: What is Immigration?

Content Goals:

- ❖ Children learn the definition of immigrant.
- ❖ Children learn we are all immigrants.



Process Goals:

- ❖ Watching a film for knowledge.
- ❖ Finding countries on a world map.
- ❖ Tracing a route of travel across a map.

Centerpiece:

- ❖ **Fievel, An American Tail**, take-home family origin worksheet.

Content:

- ❖ The concept of U.S. immigrant – a person who travels from another country to live in the United States.
- ❖ Learning about family background and history.

Process:

- ❖ Ask the class if they have heard the word “immigrant”?
- ❖ Define “immigration” for the children and ask if they know someone who has immigrated or if any students immigrated themselves.
- ❖ Introduce **Fievel** as a story of immigration from Russia. Examine with the children a map of the world. Find your local town first, then New York City and finally, Moscow in Russia. Watch the movie.
- ❖ After the movie, return to the map to discuss the distance Fievel’s family traveled to reach New York from Russia, about their journey crossing Europe and the Atlantic Ocean.
- ❖ Introduce the family origin worksheet by talking about how all of us who are not Native Americans are like Fievel, immigrants or descended from immigrants.
- ❖ Send the worksheet home with students to fill out with a caregiver or a friend.
- ❖ Conclude with a discussion of the surveys when the children bring them back to school.

Product:

- ❖ Family origins worksheet.

Resources:

- ❖ **Fievel, An American Tail**
- ❖ Family origins worksheet



Activity 2: KWL

Content Goals:

- ❖ Children take stock of their prior and current knowledge of immigration.
- ❖ Students learn Native Americans lived long, long ago in many places they no longer live today.

Process Goals:

- ❖ Children learn to frame history inquiries with “who, what, when, where, how and why” questions.

Centerpiece:

- ❖ KWL charts

Content:

- ❖ The children’s current knowledge of immigration.

Process:

- ❖ Review and discuss **Right Here on this Spot.**
- ❖ Class begins a KWL sheet for immigration study.
- ❖ Class discusses how to investigate history – by asking who, what, when, where, how and why to learn the pieces of a story. Use Fievel as an example and ask students the “W” questions based on the movie:
 - Who immigrated? (A Russian family of mice.)
 - When did they come to America? (1800’s)
 - Why did they immigrate to America? (To escape attack by cats – for freedom and a better way of life.)
 - Where did they arrive in America? (New York City)
 - How did they travel to America? (By train and ship.)
 - What happened to them in America?

Product:

- ❖ KWL chart

Resources:

- ❖ KWL chart



❖ **Right Here on this Spot**

Activity 3: Who and Where?

Content Goals:

- ❖ Students are introduced to a ship's manifest.
- ❖ Students learn immigrants came from many walks of life.

Process Goals:

- ❖ Mapping.
- ❖ Analyzing a ship's manifest for information about immigrants.

Centerpiece:

- ❖ World map, ships' passenger lists or manifests, Book: **Watch the Stars Come Out.**

Content:

- ❖ Countries of origin for various immigrant groups.

Process:

- ❖ Reading aloud **Watch the Stars Come Out** provides an introduction to this lessons' themes – who are/were immigrants and from where do/did they come?
- ❖ For mapping, begin with the students' ancestors' countries of origin as provided on the take-home sheets in Activity 1. Make a list on the board of the countries represented on the ancestor sheets.
- ❖ On a world map, students find the countries you listed on the board.
- ❖ Using lengths of yarn, students tape one end to each country of origin and the other to the U.S., until there is one piece of yarn representing immigration to the U.S. from each country identified on the children's ancestry sheets. Native American children may stretch yarn from their tribal place of origin to their current home.
- ❖ The children next tape their individual school pictures in the area of their current residence, i.e., if their school is in Nebraska, the students pictures will cluster in and around Nebraska on the map. If a child does not have a school picture, they can bring in any photo of themselves to use for the activity.



- ❖ Concluding the activity, you may wish to tape your class's group photo in the center of the individual photos, signifying "Out of many, one."
- ❖ Teacher introduces the ship's manifest by telling students they are going to be detectives looking for clues to details about various immigrants – trying to answer the "who" question. Were the immigrants on the ships men or women, young or old? What sorts of jobs did they do? A manifest, or ship passenger list, provides brief details about immigrants traveling to the U.S. Together the class looks at a manifest for information. Sample questions:
 - When were the dates of travel?
 - How many men? Women? Children?
 - What other information is on the list?
 - What does all this information tell us about immigrants as groups and as individuals? How were they alike? How were they different?

Product:

- ❖ Countries of origin mapped.

Resources:

- ❖ Children's countries of origin sheets
- ❖ World Map
- ❖ Ships' Manifests
- ❖ **Watch the Stars Come Out** (Levinson, R. & Goode, D., 1999. Bt Bound.)

Activity 4: When and Why? A Timeline

Content Goals:

- ❖ Children are introduced to the concept of immigration waves: large numbers of immigrants from the same country sometimes left/leave their homeland at the same time for a common reason; for example, the Irish exodus to escape the potato famine of the late 1840's.

Process Goals:

- ❖ Students make a timeline of immigrant waves.
- ❖ Students map immigrant waves.



Centerpiece:

- ❖ Photos and accounts of immigrant groups, world map, book: **Escaping to America**. Digital History Immigration Timeline (teacher resource).

Content:

- ❖ Dates and numbers of immigrant waves. Accounts of why immigrants left their countries of origin

Process:

- ❖ Introduce the activity by telling your students their detective challenge for the activity will be answering when and why did/do people immigrate. Read aloud and discuss **Escaping to America**. Explain this is a story based on many actual situations, that many people have immigrated to the U.S. to escape wars.
- ❖ Introduce the primary source research by exploring the difference between a book such as **Escaping to America** and actual accounts of immigration, which such books are based on.
- ❖ As a class, students study photos and personal accounts of reasons for immigration.
- ❖ Students divide into groups. Each group is assigned a different immigrant group to place on a class timeline. The groups write on the timeline the major dates of immigration for their immigrant wave and illustrate the major reason for the group's immigration.
- ❖ Each group finds its immigrant group's country of origin on the world map and draws a line from that country to the United States. Above the line, they may write the dates of large-scale immigration for that ethnic or national group.

Product:

- ❖ Timeline

Resources:

- ❖ Photos
- ❖ Accounts
- ❖ Butcher paper for timeline
- ❖ World map
- ❖ **Escaping to America** (Rosalyn Schanzer, 2000. HarperCollins.)



Activity 5: How?

Content Goals:

- ❖ Students learn about the actual physical process of immigrating – journey and arrival.
- ❖ Students learn about processes and immigrant experiences at Ellis Island.

Process Goals:

- ❖ Photo analysis

Centerpiece:

- ❖ Ellis Island photographs, book: Life at Ellis Island.

Content:

- ❖ Various means of travel to the U.S., the Ellis Island experience.

Process:

- ❖ Class reads Life at Ellis Island together and discusses. Focus on empathy questions and questions that ask students to consider why the policies at Ellis Island were considered necessary. For example, ask students how if they just arrived in a foreign country where they did not know the language. If they were at Ellis Island, how would they find a bathroom? Food? Drinking water? What if they got separated from their parents? What if they became ill?
- ❖ Class views Ellis Island photos, identifying images they recognize from the book.

Resources:

- ❖ Photos
- ❖ Life at Ellis Island (Sally Senzell Isaacs, 2002. Heinemann Library.)

Activity 6: Life in America

Content Goals:

- ❖ Immigrants encountered many new experiences in the U.S.
- ❖ Some immigrants lived in unsanitary, crowded and unsafe slum housing.
- ❖ Immigrants often used school and work opportunities to better their ways of life.



Process Goals:

- ❖ Photo and document analysis

Centerpiece:

- ❖ Immigrant accounts and photos, books: **Going Home**, **Apple Pie Fourth of July**.

Content:

- ❖ Immigrant experiences at home, work and school.

Process:

- ❖ Class reads individual immigrant accounts to discover what some immigrants experienced living their lives in America. What challenges did immigrants face? What did they enjoy about their new lives?"
- ❖ Photo analysis – examining photos of various immigrants in their contexts, students learn immigrants participated in all walks of American life – farming, banking, piecework, and city life.
- ❖ Immigration today – Introduce by asking any children in the class who have immigrated if they would like to share memories about their country of origin. Read and discuss with class **Going Home** and either **Apple Pie Fourth of July** or **The Keeping Quilt**.

Resources:

- ❖ Documents and photos
- ❖ **Apple Pie Fourth of July** (Wong, J.S. & Chodos-Irvine, M., 2002. Harcourt.)
- ❖ **Going Home** (Bunting, E. & Diaz, D., Reprint edition 1998. HarperTrophy.)
- ❖ **The Keeping Quilt** (Patricia Polacco, Reprint edition 2001. Aladdin Library.)

Activity 7: Mind Maps

Content Goals:

- ❖ Review of unit

Process Goals:

- ❖ Mind map construction
- ❖ KWL completion



Centerpiece:

- ❖ Materials from the unit's activities.

Content:

- ❖ Content from the unit as a whole.

Process:

- ❖ This is your students' chance to review and individually process what they have learned in the unit. Begin by brainstorming together what you have learned as a class. This may be done on the KWL charts.
- ❖ Class categorizes as many of the concepts as time allows. Teacher may offer the lesson plan titles as categories, or lead class to make their own choices. For example, if lesson categories are used, "Why did people immigrate to America?" might be one category heading. Within that category, students may come up with war, hunger, just wanted a better way of life, etc. When, where and why may be other categories.
- ❖ Students then may draw pictures to illustrate as many of the concepts as possible.
- ❖ The pictures and phrases may be posted on a bulletin board to make a mind map story of immigration.

Product:

- ❖ Mind Map

Resources:

- ❖ Materials from the unit.

Activity 8: Exchange of Cultures Festival

Content Goals:

- ❖ Students learn about cultural traditions and foods.
- ❖ Students celebrate recent immigrants to their communities.

Process Goals:

- ❖ Students host a community festival.



Centerpiece:

- ❖ Parents and any community members who wish to attend.

Content:

- ❖ Music, art, food, and games.

Process:

- ❖ If time and resources allow, a final celebration of cultures concludes the unit with fun and awareness that immigration is part of today.
- ❖ If an evening event is possible, parents may sign up to share a favorite family food dish, game, and/or music.
- ❖ Students display their history research (timelines, maps, photos, etc.)

Resources:

- ❖ Location such as the school cafeteria, gym or a park.
- ❖ Parent involvement.