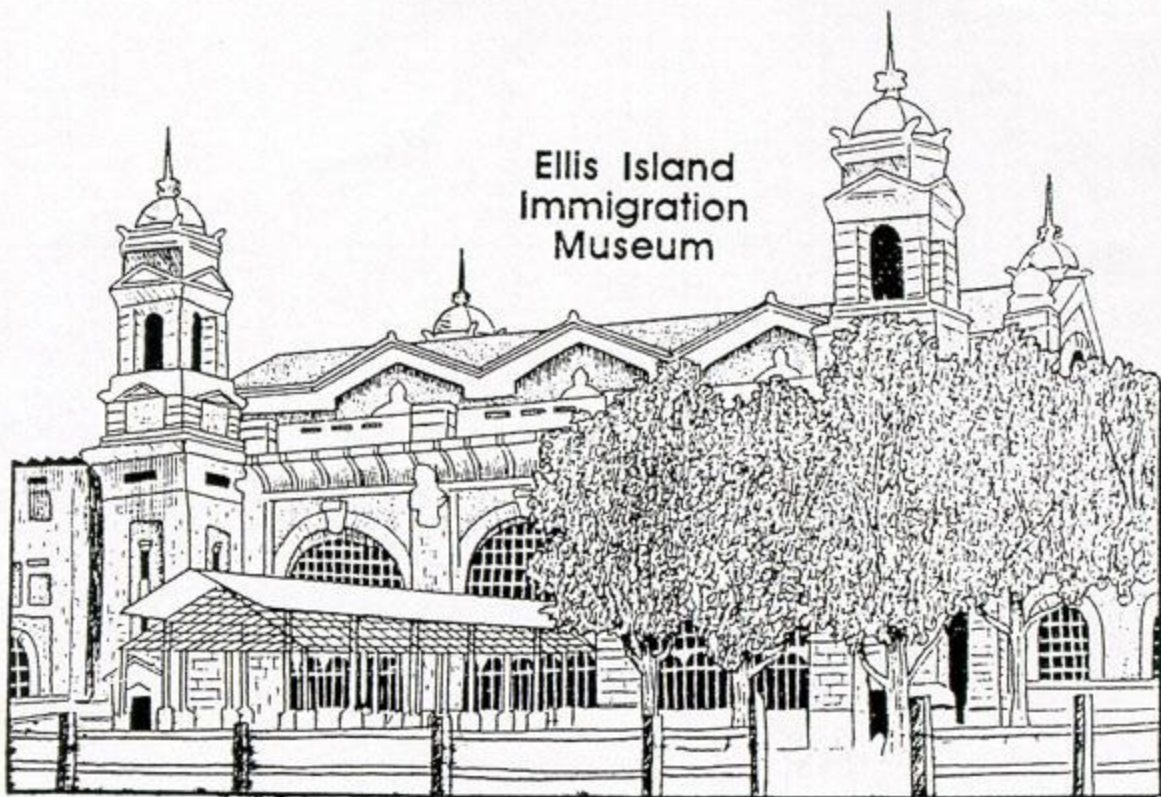


# **A LOOK AT ELLIS ISLAND**



**A Look at Ellis Island  
From 1892 to 1920**

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**Preview of Main Ideas:**

Humans have been coming to the North American continent for over 20,000 years, when one considers the Native Americans who were the first arrivals. However, during the 19th century, immigration to the United States became a means by which people from other countries, primarily those from Europe and Asia, sought refuge from various oppressions, whether political, religious, or economic, and awaited a new life in a new country. Sadly, some immigrants became prey for disreputable ship owners, landlords, and employers. The United States Congress passed the U.S. Passenger Act that set the standards covering provisions for the health and safety conditions of outgoing ships. This did not apply to the incoming vessels. Unfortunately, the U.S. Passenger Act was not always enforced! As steam ships replaced wooden sailing ships, the immigrants were among the last to actually benefit from the safer and shorter ocean voyages.

Twenty-eight million, five hundred thousand European and Asian people left their homelands between 1860 and 1920, with their dreams of coming to the United States. Ellis Island, a federal immigration station in New York Harbor, opened in 1892. This became known as an “Isle of Hope”, for those who passed a rigorous physical test and prejudice; and an “Isle of Tears”, for those who did not pass, and were returned to their homelands against their wills. First-class and cabin-class passengers, who were more affluent, usually were treated with more preferential treatment. Steerage passengers, who were usually economically poorer, were taken by ferry to Ellis Island. (Generally speaking, those immigrants who originated from Asia, usually arrived at Angel Island in California, and were processed there.)

As a port of entry and processing, Ellis Island officially closed in 1954. In 1990, Ellis Island was opened as a museum.

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

This lesson can be used with Social Studies - History or Geography classes. Other subject areas that can be integrated are Language Arts, Literature, Math, and Art.

**Teaching Grade Levels:** Grades 4 - 8

**Time Frame:** 2 - 5 days, depending upon the grade level of students, and the extent of the lesson

**Themes:**

Movement

**Essential Element:** The World in Spatial Terms

**Standard #3:** How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface

**Essential Element:** Human Systems

**Standard #9:** The characteristics, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

**Standard #12:** The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

**Essential Element:** Environment and Society

**Standard #15:** How physical systems affect human systems

**Objective #1:**

Students will read various selections, and be exposed to other media about Ellis Island.

**Objective #2:**

Students will read for understanding and comprehension.

**Objective #3:**

Students will be able to locate the countries of immigrant origins on a map.

**Objective #4:**

Students will be able to construct graphs that compare the numbers of various national groups within each ten-year period between 1892 and 1922.

**Objective #5:**

Students will be able to analyze the information and use it to write a hypothetical letter to a “friend” back in “their homeland”.

**Illinois State Goals: #14, 16, 17, and 18**

**Materials:**

Reference books (See bibliography)

Black line outline maps of Europe and Asia for each student

Colored pencils

Lined writing paper and blue or black ink pens

Graph paper or unlined paper

Index cards

Rulers

Atlases

A recording of the song: Coming to America, by Neil Diamond

**Procedure:**

1. Introduce the lesson by playing a recording of the song, Coming to America, by Neil Diamond
2. Share the reading of the reference materials with the students, by either reading aloud to them, or having them read to themselves, or in groups (pair/share)
3. Students need to make notes about how many people came to Ellis Island from each European or Asian country, between 1892 and 1922; the reasons people wanted to emigrate from their homelands; the problems they would

face; the opportunities the move might present for them; the problems and dangers they would have to face; and the challenges they might have in moving to a new country.

4. The students will then construct three graphs, each representing a ten- year period of time, from 1892 to 1922, comparing how many people came from each country.
5. The students will use the atlases to locate the countries listed in the information gathered in their notes, and color in the countries on the outline maps of Europe and Asia.
6. The teacher will prepare enough cards for the class with this information on each: gender; a name representing any country listed above (names can be found on any of the genealogy forums or web pages on the internet); age (approximately the age of the students in class); country of origin; economic status of passage payment (either first class/cabin class or steerage. Pass out the cards to each student, according to gender. They may pick “sight unseen”, or by choice. Each student is to “assume the identity” of this individual, and write a letter to a hypothetical friend or relative “back home”. In this letter, they are to include information according to their perceptions about the ship journey and conditions; how your family is doing; the “experience at Ellis Island”; seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time; if the child traveled with his/her family, (or other relatives/friends of the family) where they are now living; whether the father and/or mother have found employment; their experiences in their “new” school; and how they feel about having come to America! The students could share their letters with the class, or the teacher could read the letters aloud, with anonymity of the authors!

### **Vocabulary:**

Ellis Island

immigrant

emigrant

ancestors

passport

cultures

steerage

quarantine

Wall of Honor

Isle of Hope

Isle of Tears

ferryboat

prejudice

alien

detention

nationality

adapt

**Extentions of the lesson:**

1. Draw an outline of the map of the United States, that is about 4 feet in width. Cut out pictures of people of all ages, cultures, nationalities, occupations, etc., and glue on to the map. Fill in all spaces of land area. (Appropriate pictures can be found in magazines, travel literature, and of course, National Geographic!)
2. A word find, using related vocabulary, can be used in class. Students can also create their own word finds or crossword puzzles, using definitions as clues.
3. Students could do a short report about "their country", or of a country of their own heritage, and present it to the class.
4. Students could work on their own family trees or genealogy.

5. Students could work on a geographic map either of the country of "their immigrant", or of their own heritage background.
6. The poem, The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus, could be read in class, and discussed. The students could then try writing poetry of their own, which would reflect ideas of freedom, liberty, etc.

### **Assessment of Student Learning:**

1. Class discussion and participation
2. Quality of notes taken
3. Accuracy of graphs
4. Rubric to evaluate written "letter"

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## A LOOK AT ELLIS ISLAND

S O L Q T Z R P D G W K A B T Y B V H T  
 R T E N E M E N T A Z Z X I R T Y L I H  
 E C N N T X N K H S D A O S O R Z M S P  
 T S G L K F B N S N F B B L P E Z J T D  
 S M B P I N N T A X T P Q E S B Q J O N  
 E N X X D L E L G T E W N O S I N O R N  
 C W U B K A S J H G X O C F A L P Z Y Q  
 N E I M M I G R A T I O N T P F R Q X Q  
 A O N S S G S R A T O A B E F O E E N L  
 V I H I G T E L N V T A X A L E J X C Z  
 O I L V T E N E E I F P Y R Z U U D J J  
 P L L L T N T A O O A O A S O T D X D B  
 E D J S H E A N R L F M R D X A I R K I  
 S U O N D I A R I G N H E E A T C C G N  
 Z T F B N L B E A Z I Y O R I S E Q P X  
 X S P E I F N O B U E M Q P I G K O Y T  
 B Y D T L S K U A R Q E E J E C N X M T  
 T N Y R O N O H F O L L A W I S A E M H  
 C K B F E R R Y B O A T Y L I M A F R C  
 S E R U T L U C F S I A I T D W F C P R

ADAPT  
 ANCESTERS  
 ELLISLAND  
 FERRYBOAT  
 IMMIGRATION  
 NATIONALITY  
 QUARANTINE  
 STEERAGE

ALIENS  
 CULTURES  
 EMIGRANT  
 FOREIGNER  
 ISLEOFHOPES  
 PASSPORT  
 STATUEOFLIBERTY  
 TENEMENT

AMERICA  
 DETENTION  
 FAMILY  
 HISTORY  
 ISLEOFTEARS  
 PREJUDICE  
 STEAMSHIP  
 WALLOFHONOR



## **IMMIGRATION**

**“Once I thought to write a history of the immigration to America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.”**

**Oscar Handlin,  
American historian and educator**

**“We are a nation of immigrants. It is immigrants who brought to this land the skills of their hands and brains to make of it a beacon of opportunity and hope for all men.”**

**Herbert H. Lehman,  
American banker and politician**

# **ADDITIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

(THESE ITEMS WERE TOO NUMEROUS TO BE ADDED TO THE WEB SITE  
AND MAY BE REQUESTED FROM THE ILLINOIS GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCE)