

Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Immigration and Migration: History through Art

(Grades 3-5)



*"New York - Welcome to the land of freedom," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 2, 1887
(Library of Congress)*

Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Immigration and Migration: History through Art

BY TIM BAILEY

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze and assess primary source images.

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants and for those within its borders, there has always been a perceived freedom to live wherever one wants. This was just as true in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with many people desiring to come into this country and others desiring to move to those parts of the country that offered more safety, opportunity, and freedom. However, there is a deeper story to be told about both immigration and migration. By looking closely at that story, through contemporary cartoons and photographs, we can understand how both policy and circumstance have affected how people move into, out of, and through our country.

Over the course of two lessons, the students will analyze works of art and photographs that help tell the story of American immigration and migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The images represent both the hopes and the frustrations of that era. Students will closely analyze the works of art and photographs to understand the explicit story but also infer the more subtle stories being told. Students will use visual evidence to draw their conclusions and present arguments as directed in each lesson.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze a selection of late 19th- and early 20th-century cartoons, paintings, and photographs
- Use an activity sheet to identify the images and infer the meaning of the image and the intent of the artist or photographer
- Demonstrate understanding by answering critical thinking questions and defending their responses

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why did people from all over the world come to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

How do cartoons, photographs and other illustrations help us understand the experience of the immigrants who came to the United States?

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 2

GRADE LEVELS: 3–5

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7: Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information; b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1a–c: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on [grade-level] topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly; a) Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion; b) Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles; c. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

LESSON 1

OVERVIEW

In this lesson the students will carefully analyze two editorial cartoons concerning European immigration, especially eastern European immigration, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In addition, the students will study photographs of immigrants taken when they arrived in America and the living conditions they faced settling in a new country. The students will analyze visual evidence to understand the issues presented in these examples. An art analysis worksheet and critical thinking questions will help facilitate and demonstrate their understanding.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Adapted from “Immigration, Migration, and the Wider World, 1891–1924” and “Immigration Restriction and Americans’ Freedom to Move, 1924–1965,” in *Freedom to Move: Immigration and Migration in US History* (New York: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2013), 94, 102, and 120.

More than eighteen million new immigrants entered the United States between 1890 and 1920. Their motives for migrating differed little from those of earlier emigrants—they sought safety, asylum, opportunity, homes, happiness, and work.

The search for work brought to the United States Italians, Finns, Poles, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, Canadians, and eastern and southern Europeans. Russian Jews, in defiance of Czarist prohibitions against emigration, fled religious persecution and violent pogroms. Koreans resisted Japanese colonization, and, after 1910, Mexicans escaped revolution at home.

Later, these immigrants would be celebrated as builders of the American nation. At the time, however, Americans sought to limit their right to enter the United States. In 1896, the newly founded Immigration Restriction League demanded the exclusion of illiterate immigrants. In 1902, Congress excluded anarchists and violent revolutionaries. In 1906, it required all naturalizing immigrants to know English. In 1908, the State Department procured an agreement with Japan to stop the migration of new Japanese laborers (although those already in the United States could bring over wives). Exclusionary laws were also imposed on other Asian groups, most notably the Chinese but also Koreans. In 1910, the new immigrant station at Angel Island in San Francisco joined Ellis Island in sifting desirable from undesirable immigrants.

Immigrants to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had experiences that were as varied as the nations from which they came. Most immigrants during this time period, whether arriving from Europe or from Asia, came by ship. Many landed at Ellis Island in New York Harbor and Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, but there were processing stations elsewhere. Once in the United States, immigrants had to pass through an examination process that has been described in terms ranging from confrontational and agonizing to easy and agreeable.

MATERIALS

- “Welcome to All,” cartoon by J. Keppler, *Puck*, April 28, 1880, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-29012.
- “The Americanese Wall,” cartoon by Raymond O. Evans, *Puck*, March 25, 1916 Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-52584.
- Analyzing Art activity sheet

- Immigrants on deck of S.S. “Amerika,” H.C. White Co., 1907, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-20877
- “New York - Welcome to the land of freedom – An ocean steamer passing the Statue of Liberty: Scene on the steerage deck,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, July 2, 1887, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-38214.
- “Immigrants just arrived from Foreign Countries - Immigrant Building, Ellis Island, New York Harbor,” stereograph, Underwood & Underwood, 1904, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-15539.
- [Family in room in tenement house], Jessie Tarbox Beals for Jacob Riis, ca. 1910, Jessie Tarbox Beals / Museum of the City of New York, 90.13.3.125.
- Coming to America: Critical Thinking Questions

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute “Welcome to All” and the Analyzing Art activity sheet.
2. The students will closely examine the cartoon and respond to the questions. This can be done as a whole-class activity, in small groups, with partners, or individually. If this is one of the class’s first experiences with this kind of analysis, then it should be done as a whole-class activity.
3. Distribute “The Americanese Wall.” The students will fill out the bottom half of the Analyzing Art activity sheet for this cartoon.
4. Discussion: Ask the students
 - How did the message to potential immigrants to America change in these two illustrations?
 - What evidence in the pictures backs up that opinion?
5. Distribute the four images: “Immigrants on deck of S.S. ‘Amerika,’” “New York – Welcome to the land of freedom,” “Immigrants just arrived from Foreign Countries,” and “Family in room in tenement house.” You may choose to have the students use the Analyzing Art activity sheets with these images if you believe they will benefit from the structured examination.
6. Distribute the Coming to America: Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet and have the students respond to the questions.
7. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups. Introduce information from the Historical Background to help them place their interpretations in context.

LESSON 2

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, the students will carefully analyze a painting by the artist Jacob Lawrence. This painting is the first panel in a series that tells the story of African American migration from the South to the North in the early 20th century. In addition, the students will study a wall mural that has been painted in a park in Los Angeles. This mural portrays the history of California, and this particular section tells the tale of the repatriation of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. The students will analyze the visual evidence to understand the issues presented in these examples. They will demonstrate their understanding by answering critical thinking questions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Adapted from “Immigration, Migration, and the Wider World, 1891–1924” and “Immigration Restriction and Americans’ Freedom to Move, 1924–1965,” in *Freedom to Move: Immigration and Migration in US History* (New York: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2013), 94, 102, and 120.

The National Origins Quota Act of 1924, which took effect in 1929, reduced to 150,000 per year the number of visas available to immigrants from Europe, with most slots reserved for northern and western Europeans. After 1929 foreigners, mainly from Europe, responded by evading restrictions of the act. Restricting the freedom to move across borders sparked massive new migrations. Significantly, the United States did not restrict immigration from its immediate neighbors in the Americas. Fearing to insult the country’s Latin American allies but also responding to western growers’ demands for Mexican labor, Congress in 1924 had imposed no numerical quotas on Western Hemisphere countries. Mexicans and Canadians—who in the years before 1910 had constituted less than 3 percent of all immigrants—soon constituted a third of the diminishing numbers of new arrivals. Over time, New York City and Miami attracted sizable migrations from the English-speaking islands of the Caribbean and from Puerto Rico, the island territory acquired in 1898 from Spain.

During this same period, African Americans could and did find ways to escape the Jim Crow South, where they were subjected to violence and political and economic discrimination. They migrated north in search of better opportunities for work and schools where their children could receive the same education as whites. Only a quarter of a million left the South between 1890 and 1910, however, and that left 89 percent of African Americans under Jim Crow rule. Only when World War I sharply diminished the willingness of Europeans to risk transatlantic travel did the “great migration” of African Americans to northern cities and industrial jobs begin. Almost a million moved north between 1910 and 1930. Once again, African American migrants imagined themselves as journeying toward freedom.

During several Depression years, more foreigners left than entered the United States. The effects of the economic depression of the 1930s were especially severe for Mexican immigrants who had worked in factories and agricultural and building jobs in the West. One third of the Mexican population in the United States, over 500,000 people, was deported or repatriated between 1931 and 1934. Over 60 percent were native-born US citizens.

BACKGROUND ON THE PAINTINGS

“In 1941, Jacob Lawrence, then just twenty-three years old, completed a series of sixty paintings about the Great Migration, the mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North. Lawrence’s work is a landmark in the history of modern art and a key example of the way that history painting was radically reimagined in the modern era. Lawrence opens his sixty-panel series with “During the World War there was a great migration north by southern Negroes,” an image of a chaotic crowd in a train station pushing toward three ticket windows marked CHICAGO, NEW YORK, and ST. LOUIS. Images of train stations, railroad cars, waiting rooms, and passengers weighed down by bags recur throughout the Migration Series.”

Source: *One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series*, Museum of Modern Art, New York NY, [moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/panel/1](https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/panel/1)

“The Great Wall of Los Angeles is one of Los Angeles’ true cultural landmarks and one of the country’s most respected and largest monuments to inter-racial harmony. SPARC’s first public art project and its true signature piece, the Great Wall is a landmark pictorial representation of the history of ethnic peoples of California from prehistoric times to the 1950’s, conceived by SPARC’S artistic director and founder Judy Baca. Begun in 1974 and completed over five summers, the Great Wall employed over 400 youth and their families from diverse social and economic backgrounds working with artists, oral historians, ethnologists, scholars, and hundreds of community members. [“350,000 Mexican-Americans Deported,” one of the panels, illustrates how] Mexican-Americans including U.S. citizens were deported by train . . . because of discrimination and competition for jobs during the Great Depression.”

Source: “Deportation of Mexicans,” Great Wall of LA, Social and Public Art Resource Center, sparcinla.org/programs/the-great-wall-mural-los-angeles/

MATERIALS

- Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series Panel No. 1: During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans*, 1940–1941, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, © 2012. The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
- “500,000 Mexican Americans Deported,” segment from the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* by Judith Baca © 1976, Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1980, Photo courtesy of SPARC Archives, SPARCinLA.org.
- Analyzing Art activity sheet
- Migration and Deportation: Critical Thinking Questions

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute *The Migration Series Panel #1* and the Analyzing Art activity sheet. The students will answer the questions posed on the Analyzing Art activity sheet. This can be done as a whole-class, in small groups, with partners, or individually.
2. Distribute “350,000 Mexican Americans Deported” from the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*. The students will fill out the bottom half of Analyzing Art activity sheet.
3. Distribute the Migration and Deportation: Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet.
4. Discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups. Introduce information from the Historical Background to help them place their interpretations in context.

“Welcome to All”



“Welcome to All” by J. Keppler, Puck, April 28, 1880. (Library of Congress)

“The Americanese Wall”



THE AMERICANESE WALL, AS CONGRESSMAN
BURNETT WOULD BUILD IT.

UNCLE SAM: You're welcome in — if you can climb it!

“The Americanese Wall” by Raymond O. Evans, Puck, March 25, 1916. (Library of Congress)

Analyzing Art

Title of Piece: _____

Artist/Credited to: _____

Setting of the Piece: _____

What is the significance of the central figure(s) or object(s)? _____

What action is taking place in the piece? _____

What mood or tone is created by the image, and what is creating that mood or tone? _____

What is the artist's message to the viewer? _____

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Immigrants on deck of S.S. "Amerika," H.C. White Co., 1907. (Library of Congress)



"New York - Welcome to the land of freedom," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 2, 1887. (Library of Congress)



*“Immigrants just arrived from Foreign Countries – Immigrant Building, Ellis Island, New York Harbor,”
Underwood & Underwood, 1904 (Library of Congress)*



*[Family in room in tenement house], by Jessie Tarbox Beals for Jacob Riis, ca. 1910.
(Jessie Tarbox Beals / Museum of the City of New York)*

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Coming to America: Critical Thinking Questions

Remember to use evidence from the pictures in your answers.

How did most European immigrants get to America?

How many women do you see in the photographs “Immigrants just arrived from Foreign Countries” and “Immigrants on Deck of S.S. ‘Amerika’”? What information could this give us about new immigrants?

Does it appear that it was easy for the immigrants in the images to become new American citizens? What evidence do you see?

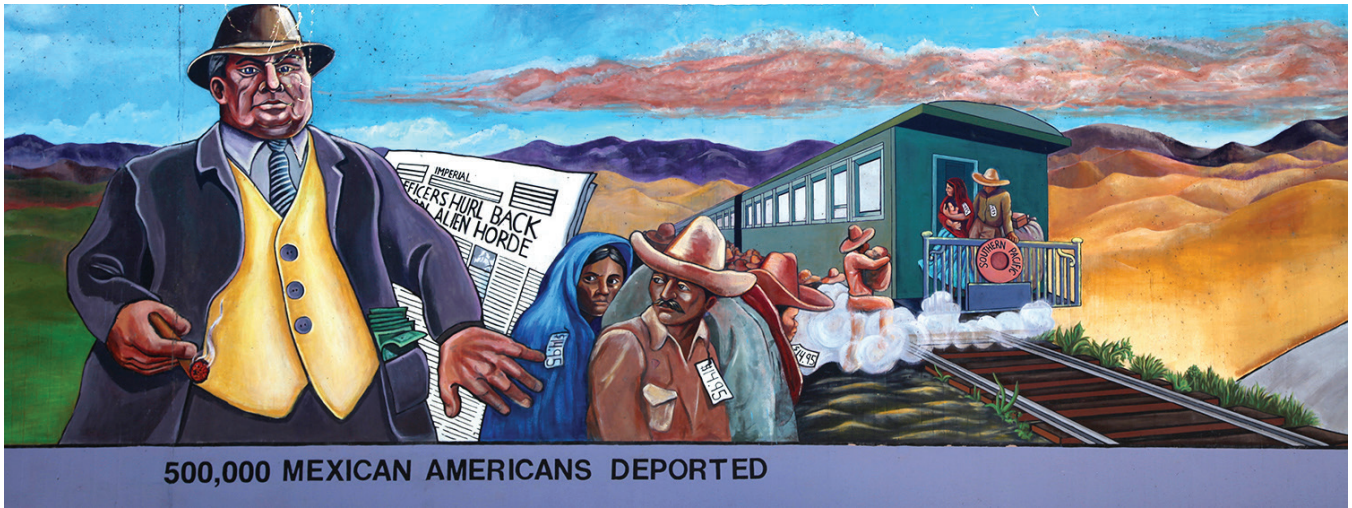
Using evidence from the photograph, what were some of the difficulties of living in a tenement at the turn of the century?

Do you think most of the new immigrants were rich or poor? What evidence do you see?

Which of these pictures gives you the best idea of what it was like to be an immigrant to the United States at that time? Remember to explain your answer using evidence from the picture.



Migration Series Panel #1 by Jacob Lawrence, 1940–1941, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. © 2020 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



*"500,000 Mexican Americans Deported," from the Great Wall of Los Angeles by Judith F. Baca © 1976.
Photo courtesy of SPARC Archives, SPARCinLA.org*

NAME _____

PERIOD _____

DATE _____

Migration and Deportation: Critical Thinking Questions

Remember to use evidence from the pictures in your answers.

Most of the people in the *Migration Series* painting lived in states such as Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Which direction are they traveling in this painting? (Use a map to check your answer.)

Many of the people shown in the *Migration Series* painting lived in small towns or on farms in the southern states. Where are they going, and what else can we tell about them from this painting?

In the mural “500,000 Mexican Americans Deported,” what does the headline of the newspaper tell us is happening?

What do the people in the mural have in common, and what clues do we have about who is being deported?

Describe the person on the left side of the painting. Why do you think he is there? Use evidence to support your answer.
