Lesson Plan

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument

Finding a Home

Grades 4-7
Post Ellis Island Lesson Plan

Overview:

As immigrants finished processing at Ellis Island, many waited with hopes, fears, and anticipation about where to settle next. Some preferred the comforts of immigrant communities nearby, whereas others hoped to find better job opportunities outside the greater New York area. *Finding a Home* hopes to simulate the experience of being a newly-arrived immigrant excited to take their next steps in America.

New York State Learning Standards:

Elementary:
Standard 4: 1B, 1C, 1E
Standard 5: 1B
Intermediate:
Standard 4: 1C, 1D, 1E
Standard 5: 1A, 1C

Time Frame:

30-35 minutes

Materials:

- Pens, Pencils, and Paper
- Handout of descriptions of several destinations in early 20th Century America
- Possible oral interviews from the Ellis Island archives

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe some of the feelings immigrants faced when deciding on a new settlement in the United States.
- Contrast the benefits and drawbacks of living in a new location when determining a place to live and compare that to the choices immigrants make past and present.
- Formulate several reasons why immigrants elected to live in selected areas.

Procedure:

1. Inform students that immigrants encountered very difficult choices when deciding where to go next. Mutual-aid societies persuaded them to go one way, whereas the lure of labor and opportunity to own land enticed them to go elsewhere. Split the class into groups of three-to-four and inform them that they will act as their own mock family from Poland about to make the same decisions as immigrants a century ago. Distribute family profile and advertisements/classifieds for each desired location.

2. The descriptions depict three locations (revealed at the end of the lesson), each offering a distinct advantage to relocating to that area. As immigrants from Poland, Location A offers a large ethnic community but the employment prospects remain uncertain. Location B promotes ample farming opportunities (and opportunity to own land). The area has vast farmland, but very few people of your ethnic culture, and features little of what your family was used to. As someone who specializes in building the railroads, Location C offers the greatest employment that matches your skill set, but the train tickets are the most costly.

3. For each part of the description read, the groups, as newly-processed immigrants, will determine the benefits and drawbacks of each proposed destination. Explain to the groups that they will have a fifty-dollar budget to make their decisions. Inform students that they will have about ten minutes to determine the best destination for their families, backing up their decisions with well-supported facts.

    - Is it more important to have readily-available employment or a job that matches your skill-set but is more expensive to get to travel to?
    - What advantages do you think, you as a newly-arrived immigrant family, would find in your own ethnic community?
    - What are the advantages of running your own business?

4. After all the groups have made their decisions, a discussion will follow providing a detailed analysis to why students decided to settle in that area.

    - Why do you think having people from the same country (a sense of community) is important for newly-arrived immigrants?
    - How do you think the decisions immigrants made in the past compares to the choices immigrants make today?

5. After the discussion, inform the groups of their elected destinations:

    - Location A indicates that the group has decided to relocate to Chicago, Illinois.
    - Location B reveals that the lure of economic opportunity has driven them to Sioux Falls, North Dakota.
    - Location C showcases a family that will make the cross-country trek to San Francisco, California.

Location A:

- **This area features a large Polish community, along with many immigrant aid societies, shops, and food vendors from your local community.**
- **Most immigrants work in the meatpacking district, with secondary jobs being in shipping grains and wheat by the vast water regions.**
- **An esthetician (someone who prepares the cows to serviceable portions) makes $6 a week, while a stevedore (a person who loads and unloads ships) makes $5 a week depending on experience and how fast the job gets done.**
- **Train ticket to Location A will cost $25.**
- **Certain neighborhoods contain local churches and synagogues native to cities in Poland.**

Location B:

- **This region boasts hundreds of acres of farmland, and currently sells fertile soil for an affordable $0.20/ acre.**
- **Farmers have reported earnings of $9 a week.**
- **Advertisers have marketed this area as a place where you can work at your own pace. However, you have little to no experience working at a farm.**
- **Your cousin Max, who arrived here three years earlier, lives in an area near this farmland.**
- **Most of the newly-arrived immigrants hail from countries like Sweden and Finland.**
- **A railroad ticket to Location B will cost $32.**

Location C:

- **With the expansion of the railroad, this city is looking for people who have experience as a blacksmith. Wages vary with how much work gets done.**
- **While the farthest location out of the three, this area offers moderate temperatures, mountainous regions, and a fair amount of green space.**
- **A small number of immigrants from Poland have started to settle in Location C.**
- **Prices for train tickets vary from $45 for multiple stops to $60 for a direct route to this destination.**
- **Rents range from $11 to $14 on a monthly basis**