



**American Immigration Law Foundation
Immigration Curriculum Center Lesson Plan**

**We Are Americans:
Voices of the Immigrant Experience**

Grade Level: Middle School (6th-8th grades)

Goal: To teach students about the history of immigration through the voices and experiences of the immigrants.

Objectives: Students will:

- Study the specific immigration histories of various groups, their roles in and contribution to American society
- Compare and contrast immigration histories of various groups
- Expand research and critical thinking skills
- Examine primary source materials to expand knowledge of immigration history and process
- Write personal and bibliographical narratives

Materials:

- Six copies of [*We Are Americans: Voices of the Immigrant Experience*](#), by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, Scholastic Nonfiction, 2003.
- Access to the Internet.

Procedure:

1. Begin the unit with a discussion of immigration. Use some of the following discussion points:
 - Ask students what they know of their own personal immigration history.
 - Who was the first person in the family to immigrate to America? Who was the most recent immigrant? Where did they come from? Why did they come? How did they come? What do they know about the immigration experience of their family members? What kind of work did they do in

their old country? What work did they do in America? Where did they first arrive? Where did they settle? Why?

- Ask students if they know any recent immigrants. What do they know of their stories?
 - Do they know any famous immigrants? Start a class list of famous immigrants
2. Divide class into six groups of four to five students. Give each group a copy of *We Are Americans*. Read and discuss the introduction with the class.
 3. Have students peruse the book and discuss the various materials presented: photos, artifacts, narratives, drawings, portraits, pamphlets, documents, etc.
 4. Discuss primary source materials. What are they? Where do we find them? What is their value and use?
 5. Assign each group two consecutive chapters in the book to read and research. Students will use their reading and research as a basis for some of the following activities.

Activities:

1. In Their Own Words

Students will:

- read first person accounts of immigration in the book
- compare immigration stories
- research the history of that immigrant group
- write a bibliographical narrative about the person including historical research
- illustrate the narratives

2. Letters As Ads

Based on reading and research, students will write a letter in the voice of an immigrant to friends and family “advertising” his/her experiences in America. Create a picture either by drawing or with a digital camera to “send” with the letter. Display letters and illustrations on a class bulletin board.

3. How Did They Come Here?

Compare and contrast immigration histories and experiences of different groups.

Use the internet to research and compare the experience of the passengers on the ships *Golden Venture* and *St. Louis* in their attempts to come to America.

4. Jigsaw Timeline

Use the book to create a visual time line of American immigration.

Have each group create a chart for each of the chapters they were assigned, displaying the time period covered, the groups who came to America in that time, the number of people who came and the world events that had an impact on immigration in that time. Students

might also include famous people who immigrated in that time period.

Display the charts in chronological order around the classroom

5. What Story Does The Picture Tell?

Have students choose a picture or photo from the book to use as the prompt for a story or poem about the immigration history of the subject.

6. Port of Entry

Have students research the two most famous ports of entry to the United States, Ellis Island on the east coast and Angel Island on the west. Compare and contrast the experiences of the immigrants who passed through them.

7. In The News

National and world events had a great impact on immigration and immigration policy and law. For example: the Louisiana Purchase, World War II, pogroms in Eastern Europe, the Irish Potato Famine, the Gold Rush, the building of Transcontinental Railroad, the war in Viet Nam, the events of 9/11, etc. Using the Internet and news sources, have students research current immigration issues. From what parts of the world are people emigrating today? What factors are causing them to immigrate? How is this impacting on American society and immigration policy?

8. Surprising Immigration Facts

One third of Washington's soldiers were immigrants. The first Asian immigrants were from the Philippines. The first illegal immigrants were Africans brought over after the slave trade was abolished in 1807. Create a bulletin board of surprising immigration facts and add to it as students discover them in the course of their research.

9. Famous American Immigrants

Have students choose a famous immigrant to research and present to the class. Create a "postage stamp" for the person showing their image and contribution to their adopted country. Create a "wall of fame" using these images and biographies students write about them.

10. Naturalization

Have students research the process to become an American citizen. How and why has that process changed over the course of our history? What are the laws for citizenship in other countries?

11. Class Museum of Immigration

The objects and pictures carried on the journey to America held great meaning for immigrants and their families. Invite students to bring such items to school, or to create facsimiles, and write the history of the item and its meaning for the family. Create a classroom display of the objects and stories. Invite parents and other classes to visit the class "museum"

Assessment: Have students create a portfolio of their work from the unit including research, journals, writing, presentations, quizzes, and tests.