

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 to the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original text and visual documents of historical significance. Through a step-by-step process, students will acquire the skills to analyze and assess text and visual resources and develop well-reasoned viewpoints about them.

In these three lessons, students will explore European and Asian immigration to the United States, the Great Migration, and deportation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries using paired written and visual sources. They will analyze texts written by immigrants, migrants, and deportees, and photographs and art representing related events. Student understanding will be assessed through an argumentative essay using textual and visual evidence to support an argument.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source documents (letters, poems) and works of arts (cartoons, photographs)
- Relate the primary sources to specific immigrant groups and explain the meaning of the documents
- Understand and explain the literal meaning and infer the subtle stories behind each primary source
- Draw conclusions about and discuss interpretations of the primary source materials
- Complete an essay using textual and visual evidence from the primary source documents

NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS: 3

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6–12

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9: Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1.a: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content. b. Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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.

During this same period, African Americans sought to escape the Jim Crow South, where they were subjected to violence and political and economic discrimination. Almost a million moved north between 1910 and 1930 in search of better opportunities for work and schools where their children could receive the same education as white students. African American migrants viewed themselves as journeying toward freedom.

Immigrants from Mexico had begun entering the United States in large numbers between 1910 and 1926. 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. Thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans were deported to Mexico as jobs became scarce and Americans sought jobs that had once been relegated to immigrant laborers.

LESSON 1

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze a cartoon
- Read a first-person description of an event and explain the content
- View, describe, and infer the actions of individuals in a photograph
- Read a poem and explain its content

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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. Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-29012.
- “Arriving at Ellis Island” excerpt from Aaron Domnitz, “Why I Left My Old Home and What I Have Accomplished in America,” in *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Immigrants*, ed. and trans. Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 138–139.
- “Testing an Asian Immigrant” at the Angel Island immigration station, San Francisco, 1931. Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.
- “A Night at the Immigration Station” by Choi Kyung Sik. Poem published in *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940*, ed. Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 135.
- Analyzing Art worksheet (2 copies per student)
- In Their Own Words worksheet (2 copies per student)

PROCEDURE

You may choose to have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of no more than 3 or 4 students.

1. Distribute “Welcome to All” and the “Analyzing Art” worksheet. The cartoon reflects the welcome extended to immigrants of the 1880s and the concept of America as a land of freedom and opportunity, a safe refuge from the oppression of European monarchs. The signs read: “Free education, free land, free speech, free ballot, free lunch.” and “No oppressive taxes, no expensive kings, no compulsory military service, no knouts or dungeons.”
2. The students will closely examine the immigration cartoon from 1880 and analyze it using the worksheet. This can be done as a whole-class activity with discussion, in small groups, with partners, or individually. If this is one of the students’ first experiences with this kind of analysis, it should be done as a whole class.
3. Distribute “Arriving at Ellis Island” by Aaron Domnitz and the “In Their Own Words” worksheet.
4. “Share read” the excerpts with the students. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
5. The students will then closely read Domnitz’s description of his examination at Ellis Island in 1906 and analyze the document, answering the questions on the worksheet.
6. Distribute “Testing an Asian Immigrant” and Analyzing Art. The photograph shows an Asian

immigrant receiving a medical examination to prevent the spread of infectious diseases at the Immigration Station on Angel Island, San Francisco, California, in 1931. The prevalence of major epidemic diseases such as smallpox, yellow fever, and cholera spurred Congress to enact a national law in 1878 to prevent the introduction of contagious and infectious diseases into the United States.

7. The students will examine the photograph of an immigrant being examined and fill out Analyzing Art.
8. Distribute “A Night at the Immigration Station” by Choi Kyung Sik and In Their Own Words. Share read the poem with the students as described above. The students will analyze the poem written by a Korean immigrant and fill out the worksheet.
9. As students or student groups share out their responses, discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups. Discuss information from the Historical Background.

LESSON 2

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze two works of art
- Analyze two written documents that are “paired” with the works of art
- Use visual and textual evidence to demonstrate understanding of historical events

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The promise of a chance to improve their lives motivated African Americans in the early 20th century to migrate north. Many African Americans living under Jim Crow laws in the southern states were denied their basic rights and heard about opportunities to improve their living conditions, pay, and education in northern cities. As a result, hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved north and, between 1910 and 1930, in cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, the black population increased by 40 percent. Jacob Lawrence’s paintings evoke this period of African American migration.

Other groups migrated involuntarily. During the Great Depression, Mexican Americans and Mexicans living and working in Southern California were encouraged and sometimes forced to leave the United States. Economic, political, and racial prejudice contributed to this forced repatriation.

MATERIALS

- Jacob Lawrence (1940–1941), *The Migration Series Panel #1*: During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans. Source: The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, ©2012. The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
- Letter from Cleveland Gailliard to the Bethlehem Baptist Association, April 1, 1917 (Carter G. Woodson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division)
- *350,000 Mexican Americans Deported* - Segment from the Great Wall of Los Angeles, Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1980.
- Translation of a letter from Pablo Guerrero to Los Angeles County, May 28, 1934. (Los Angeles

- County Board of Supervisors)
- Analyzing Art worksheet (2 per student)
- In Their Own Words worksheet (2 per student)

PROCEDURE

You may choose to have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of no more than 3 or 4 students.

1. Distribute *The Migration Series Panel #1* and the “Analyzing Art” worksheet. The painting is the first of a series about migration by Jacob Lawrence. In the Great Migration, between 1910 and 1930, hundreds of thousands of African Americans left the rural South to travel to the North in the hope of a better life working in factories.
2. The students will closely examine the painting and analyze it using the worksheet. This can be done as a whole-class activity with discussion, in small groups, with partners, or individually.
3. Distribute the Cleveland Gailliard Letter and In Their Own Words and share read the letter with the class as described in Lesson 1. The students will then closely read Gailliard’s letter about migrating north and analyze the document, answering the questions on the worksheet.
4. Distribute *350,000 Mexican Americans Deported* and Analyzing Art. The art is a portion of a mural that stretches 2,754 feet depicting the history of Los Angeles. Widespread unemployment in the West during the Great Depression resulted in a mass deportation of 350,000 Mexicans. This number included many Mexican Americans who were legal American citizens. The students will examine the mural depicting Mexican American deportation and fill out Analyzing Art.
5. Distribute the Pablo Guerrero Letter and In Their Own Words and share read the letter with the class as described in Lesson 1. The students will analyze the letter written by a deported Mexican and fill out In Their Own Words.
6. As students or student groups share out their responses, discuss different interpretations developed by the students or student groups. Discuss the information in the Historical Background.

LESSON 3

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate their understanding of American immigration and migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries
- Write an argumentative essay using evidence from documents and images presented during the two previous lessons

MATERIALS

- “Welcome to All,” cartoon by J. Keppler, *Puck*, April 28, 1880 from the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-29012.
- “Arriving at Ellis Island” excerpt from Aaron Domnitz, “Why I Left My Old Home and What I Have Accomplished in America,” in *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European*

Immigrants, ed. and trans. Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 138–139.

- “Testing an Asian Immigrant” at the Angel Island immigration station, San Francisco; 1931. Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.
- “A Night at the Immigration Station” by Choi Kyung Sik. Poem published in *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940*, ed. Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 135.
- Jacob Lawrence (1940–1941), *The Migration Series Panel #1*: During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans. Source: The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, ©2012. The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
- Letter from Cleveland Gailliard to the Bethlehem Baptist Association, April 1, 1917 (Carter G. Woodson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division)
- 350,000 Mexican Americans Deported - Segment from the Great Wall of Los Angeles, Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1980.
- Translation of a letter from Pablo Guerrero to Los Angeles County, May 28, 1934. (Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors)
- Completed Analyzing Art worksheets
- Completed In Their Own Words worksheets
- “Historical Background: Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Immigration and Migration” with information on Aaron Domnitz, Choi Kyung Sik, Cleveland Gailliard, and Pablo Guerrero from *Freedom to Move: Immigration and Migration in US History* (New York: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2013), 94, 102, 112, and 120.
- Essay Prompts

PROCEDURE

1. All of the students should have copies of the primary source materials as well as their completed worksheets.
2. Distribute Historical Background: Early 20th-Century Immigration and Migration. Students should read through this information to round out their understanding of the important issues during this period.
3. Students will now write an argumentative essay defending or refuting a statement about immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The students should select one of the statements or you may assign the prompt of your choice. The essay questions have been arranged from the most literal to the more inferential. Students must support their answers with textual and visual evidence from the documents they have analyzed over the past two lessons.
4. Student essays can be completed in class or finished outside of class.

HANDOUTS FOR LATE 19TH- AND EARLY 20TH-CENTURY IMMIGRATION AND MIGRATION: HISTORY THROUGH ART

European Immigration: Image



“Welcome to All,” cartoon by J. Keppler, *Puck*, April 28, 1880. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

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 piece, and what in the picture is creating that mood or tone?

What message is the artist giving to the viewer?

European Immigration: Text

“Arriving at Ellis Island” by Aaron Domnitz (1906), excerpted from “Why I Left My Old Home and What I Have Accomplished in America,” in *My Future Is in America: Autobiographies of Eastern European Immigrants*, ed. and trans. Jocelyn Cohen and Daniel Soyer (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 138-139.

My first contact with my new country was the brief conversation between me and the immigration officials. We were put into short lines as we entered the large buildings at Ellis Island. Each line had to go by a small table next to which officials sat who questioned each immigrant in his language. The new immigrant felt right at home. My line spoke Yiddish. Hence, a big, strange country recognized my language that I had brought here with me from abroad as an official language. In Russia and Germany, I did not receive any such privilege.

One official asked me what I would do in America. I told him that until then I had been a Hebrew teacher. He smiled, “A rebbe?” “No.” I said, “A teacher!”

A second official called out, “What’s the difference?” I explained that a “rebbe” is Hasidic. They laughed at me. “Go, go,” they said, “you’ll be a great rebbe in America,” and pushed me aside. I looked around. Here I am on the other side of the railing, among those who had been let in. But why did they laugh at me? It’s nothing. People are good natured here and they were joking. I liked the reception.

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

In Their Own Words

Author:

When was it written? _____

Where was it written? _____

What clues in the text reveal why it was written?

What mood or tone is created by the author, and what words are creating that mood or tone?

What can you conclude about the author's situation?

Asian Immigration: Image



“Testing an Asian immigrant” at the Angel Island immigration station, San Francisco, 1931. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

Asian Immigration: Text

“A Night at the Immigration Station,” by Choi Kyung Sik. From *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910–1940*, ed. Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 135.

“A Night at the Immigration Station,”

By Choi Kyung Sik (1925), *Translated by Jikyung Hwang and Charles Egan*

Why are my hands,
Exhausted from crossing a vast ocean,
Now holding iron bars?
The rain cries out and wakes me up
Because it pities me.
Angel Island, sleeping tight,
No matter whether you hear this song or not,
It is the complaint of a foreign guest
Whose whole heart is burning.

Even though it's said America is wonderful,
How pathetic it has made me,
If my mother knew about this,
How shocked she would be.
This border created by rascals—
When can it be broken?
I hope people all over the world
Will become brothers soon.

Migration and Deportation: Image



Migration Series Panel #1 (Jacob Lawrence, 1940–41), The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. © 2012 Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence. Courtesy of the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation.

Migration and Deportation: Text

Letter from Cleveland Gailliard to the Bethlehem Baptist Association, April 1, 1917. (Carter G. Woodson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division)

Mobile Ala April 1st, 1917

The Bethlehem Baptist Association

I take pain to pen you a few lines for Information about coming North and I see your advertisement in the Chicago Defender and I am verry [sic] fond of the Defender I get it every week when I can and I like to read it and I am a colored young man in need of a position because I have a family to support and I am out off [sic] a job and I can't get nothing to do to Support them. I have been out of a job for five months or more and have been sick to bed. I am up again thanks to the good Lord and I am a member of Stone Street Baptist Church the oldest Baptist church in the South and I am 31 years old and I can fill the Position as a porter in a grocery store or run an elevator or drive a team or do most anything and I would for the association to please help me get up their please and get me a position please and I will pay you the expenses back When I get up their and got to work and I will work. I was working here for the New Orleans Mobile & Chicago RR running the Elevator and cleaning up and they want me to work night and day for the same amount of salary which was only \$20.00 per month and so I quit and I have been looking ever since last Nov. so this is all at the present from

Cleveland Gailliard

Direct your letter
(Gen. Del.) Post Office,
Mobile, Ala

Migration and Deportation: Image



350,000 Mexican Americans Deported - Segment from the Great Wall of Los Angeles, Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1980.

Migration and Deportation: Text

Translation of letter from Pablo Guerrero to Los Angeles County, May 28, 1934. (Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors).

L.A. County
Mexico

5/28/34. Mexicali, Low. Calif.

Los Angeles, Cfa.

By these presents I hereby make it known that my family and myself were deported into Mexico on 12/8/32, on the S.P. trains that left Los Angeles, Calif., and in view of the fact that all of my children were born in the U.S. of A., they do not like the Mexican customs and wish to return to the U.S. in company with their parents and ask the Los Angeles County authorities, as a favor, to address the Department of Labor in Washington, requesting that the American Consulate in Mexicali, Low. Cfa. be ordered to grant me immigration papers, paying the \$18.00 dollars for each Pass-Port.

I want to arrange everything legally; I do not wish to violate the frontier Immigration Law, and I want my Passport issued with the seal of an American citizen. I worked in the U.S. of A. since 1904 with different companies. I registered in the world war in Johnston, Arizona, Cochise Co. I have never given my services to the Mexican government nor to Mexican capital. I have worked all of my life, since I was 19 years of age in the U.S. of A., and that is why I wish to return to the country where I am entitled to live with my children so that they be educated in the schools of your country and not in Mexico.

Besides, the Mexican Government here does not give any assistance nor protection to children born in the U.S. of A., and for that reason I ask that my children and myself be allowed to return to the country in which they are entitled to live.

Historical Background: Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Immigration and Migration

Aaron Domnitz: Arriving at Ellis Island (1906)

On January 1, 1892, the Ellis Island Immigration Station opened in New York Harbor under the aegis of the federal government to process the growing number of immigrants arriving from Europe. Immigrants to the United States were required to pass medical examinations and interviews and supply proof that family or a job awaited them.

Aaron Domnitz, born in 1884 in a village in Belarus (western Russia), was an eager and diligent student. He graduated from a yeshiva (Jewish school) and became a teacher of Hebrew studies. By 1905 he had traveled to the city of Minsk and became aware of political unrest. He joined a socialist Bund and witnessed escalating violence between young reformers and Russian authorities. However, his main reasons for leaving were that he had been overcome by restlessness and wished to escape the constricted world of Russia that denied his culture and to leave behind the village world of his parents.

Domnitz was met by a cousin with whom he lived in the Bronx. He held jobs successively as a plumber and a tailor and pursued a degree to become a dentist. He then moved to Baltimore and worked as a dentist and raised a family. The arc of Domnitz's life replicated many who found a first home with relatives, got jobs with assistance from religious social agencies, and pursued higher education as a springboard to opportunity and prosperity in the United States.

"A Night at the Immigration Station," by Choi Kyung Sik

The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 barred entry to all Asians to the United States, with the exception of students who had obtained visas from an American consulate. In 1925,

Korean-born Choi Kyung Sik received a Japanese passport from a U.S. consulate. Armed with these documents, Kyung Sik sailed from Yokohama to San Francisco. A graduate of Chosen Christian College in Korea, Kyung Sik also carried a letter attesting to financial support and admission to De Pauw University. After reviewing these papers at Angel Island, the Board of Special Inquiry allowed him to proceed, noting that he spoke English and was qualified as a student. Kyung Sik spent only one night on Angel Island, while many other prospective immigrants spent weeks and even months waiting to be cleared for entry into the United States. During that lonely night on Angel Island he wrote a poem lamenting the frightening experience. When the Angel Island facility was renovated many years later dozens of these kinds of poems were found written and carved on the walls of the holding areas.

Cleveland Gailliard Letter

During “The Great Migration” from 1920 to 1930 more than a million African Americans moved from the southern United States to the urban centers of the North and Midwest. Many African Americans wrote to organizations and newspapers in the North seeking assistance. *The Chicago Defender*, a black paper founded in 1905, was read extensively in the South and actively supported by the migrations. It served as a clearinghouse for information on the North, printing tips on job listings and housing in Chicago. The majority of the writers of the letters cited virulent racism and poverty as their reasons for migrating.

This letter was written by Cleveland Gailliard of Mobile, Alabama, in 1917. He was responding to an advertisement that the Bethlehem Baptist Association in Chicago had placed in the *Chicago Defender*. He asked the association to help find him a position and to send money for his trip to Chicago, which he promised to repay as soon as he got a job. At least 110,000 African Americans migrated to Chicago between 1916 and 1918, nearly tripling the city’s black population.

Pablo Guerrero Letter

Effects of the nationwide economic depression of the 1930s were especially severe for Mexican immigrants who had worked in factories, agricultural, and building jobs in the West. Overburdened relief agencies in Los Angeles collaborated with representatives of the Mexican consulate to repatriate thousands of immigrant workers back to Mexico. Charitable agencies assisted destitute Mexicans to board southbound trains. The County of Los Angeles started programs of deportation of unemployed workers and their families.

Most Mexicans who were forcibly returned to Mexico endured increasing poverty and few opportunities to make a living. Among this group was Pablo Guerrero, who tried to return to the United States. In 1934, Los Angeles County officials received a letter from Guerrero, who had been repatriated in 1932. He requested immigrant status for his wife and children, all of whom had been born in the United States. County officials did not grant his request. The Mexican population of Los Angeles decreased 30 percent between 1930 and 1935.

Essay Prompts

Defend or refute one of the following statements. Remember to use textual and visual evidence to back up your arguments.

1. People immigrate and migrate because they believe that they can find a better job if they move.
2. Most immigrants and migrants needed help in order to make the move; they couldn't do it by themselves.
3. The United States government makes immigration policy based on what is best for the country, not on what is best for immigrants.