

The Jewish Immigrant Experience in America

Overview

Students will use primary sources from the Library of Congress' website to learn about the lives of Jewish immigrants to America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As an optional activity, they can supplement this information with a secondary source and consider the differences between the two sources.

This resource includes:

- 1) A lesson plan
- 2) A student worksheet
- 3) An answer sheet

Note

Please download the latest version of this lesson before using it. ICS frequently updates, revises, and strengthens its materials. Sign up at www.icsresources.org/register to be notified of major updates, new materials, and events in your area. Please send questions, suggestions, and requests about ICS educational materials to bchaika@icsresources.org.

Goals

- 1) Students will use better understand the American immigrant experience by learning about Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 2) Students will be able to articulate notable features of Jewish immigrant life, including economic conditions and Americanization.

Note

This lesson focuses on nineteenth and early twentieth century immigration. Lesson One in The First Amendment Center's *Living with Our Deepest Differences* curriculum contains excellent resources for examining early Jewish immigration in the seventeenth century.

Materials

Each student or student group needs:

- 1) *Jewish Immigrant Primary Source Scavenger Hunt* worksheet
- 2) Either
 - a. Internet access OR
 - b. Print-out of <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html>
- 3) (Optional) *Jews in America during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* from "The History of Jews in America" lesson



Instruction Procedure

Suggested Homework Assignment Prior to Lesson

- 1) Have students research and record the reasons that someone, perhaps one of their ancestors or family members, immigrated to the United States and what that individual's life was like when s/he arrived.

Anticipatory Set

1a) *If the suggested homework activity was assigned:*

- a. In small groups, have students share their immigrant stories.
- b. Ask the class "Why is it important to know about immigrant experiences?"

1b) *If the suggested homework activity was NOT assigned:*

- a. Solicit student volunteers to share what they know about the reasons why someone, perhaps their ancestors or family members, immigrated to the United States and what that individual's life was like when s/he arrived.
- 2) After several students have shared their thoughts, have students discuss how the stories are similar and how they are different.
- 3) Have students discuss how and why families' immigrant experiences might be important to them even if they happened long ago.
- 4) Inform students that they are going to use a primary source scavenger hunt to learn more about the experience of one immigrant group, Jews, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mention that:
 - a. Most American Jews have ancestors who immigrated during this period.
 - b. Their ancestors' experiences continue to be important to the Jewish community.
 - c. Jewish immigrant experiences during this period were similar to other groups and helps one understand immigrant life in general during that period.

Activity 1: Primary Source Scavenger Hunt

- 1) Distribute *Jewish Immigrant Primary Source Scavenger Hunt*. If students have internet access, direct them to www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html on the Library of Congress *From Haven to Home* exhibition. Otherwise, distribute printed copies of this website (approximately 9 pages).
- 2) If the website is used, inform students they can click on the images for an enlarged view and click on the question marks with the word "discover" for additional information.
- 3) In mixed-ability pairs, have students use the webpage to answer the questions on *Jewish Immigrant Primary Source Scavenger Hunt*.

Activity 2 (Optional): Secondary Source Reading

- 1) Distribute *Jews in America during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* from "The History of Jews in America" lesson.



- 2) While remaining in their mixed ability pairs, have students read the handout and write a paragraph on how the secondary source reading can help them better understand the primary source material from the website.

Closure

- 1) Ask students to share and discuss their responses to questions from the worksheet. In particular, address questions 3, 5, 8, and 10 to reinforce key aspects of the immigrant experience.
- 2) (optional) If activity 2 was used, have students share their thoughts on how the secondary source reading helped them better understand the primary source material.
- 3) Have students discuss what the Jewish American experience with immigration reveals about immigration to America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 4) Have students discuss whether these aspects of immigration are still relevant today and/or whether there are parallels with the experiences of the immigrant they discussed in the anticipatory set.



Jewish Immigrant Primary Source Scavenger Hunt

*Answer the questions by reading the information at
www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/haven-century.html*

1. a) Which document shows that there were many Jewish immigrants to America from Germany in the mid-19th century? How does this document show this?

b) What else can be learned from this document?

2. Who was Houdini? Why did his family immigrate to America?

3. Why do you think Emma Lazarus' poem is attached to the base of the Statue of Liberty?

4. According to the World War I poster, how and why should Jewish immigrants help with the war effort?

5. What can you learn about the economic conditions that Jewish immigrants to America faced? Reference at least three primary sources in your answer.

6. a) Which source shows that some immigrants were not allowed into the country?

b) Why do you think there was a song about this?

7. a) Identify sources that show how the government helped Jewish immigrants to become “more American.”

b) Identify sources that show how Jewish Americans tried to help new Jewish immigrants become “more American.”

c) Identify a source that is critical of becoming “more American.”

8. a) Why do you think Jewish American immigrants tried to become “more American?”

b) What do you think it means to become “more American?”

c) Do you think trying to become “more American” is a good thing? Why or why not?

9. Who was Einstein? Why did he immigrate to America?

10. Why do you think Jewish immigrants composed patriotic songs in Yiddish? Try to explain both why they would compose patriotic songs and why they would sing them in Yiddish.

Jewish Immigrant Primary Source Scavenger Hunt

Answer Sheet

1. a) Which document shows that there were many Jewish immigrants to America from Germany in the mid-19th century? How does this document show this? ***Prayer Book for Travelers to America*; The fact that a book was published for such a targeted audience (German, Jewish, and immigrating to America), suggests there were many German Jewish immigrants at this time.**

b) What else can be learned from this document? **These immigrants valued their religion or traditions.**
2. Who was Houdini? Why did his family immigrate to America? **Houdini was a great magician and escape artist. His family immigrated to America when he was a child because his father became the religious leader of a community in Wisconsin.**
3. Why do you think Emma Lazarus' poem is attached to the base of the Statue of Liberty? **Answers will vary, but might mention that the Statue of Liberty symbolizes the same understanding of America that the poem expresses.**
4. According to the World War I poster, how and why should Jewish immigrants help with the war effort? **They should not waste anything. Since they came seeking freedom, they should help the effort to preserve it.**
5. What can you learn about the economic conditions that Jewish immigrants to America faced? Reference at least three primary sources in your answer. **Answers will vary but might mention:**
 - 1) There were Jewish neighborhoods with large amounts of commerce as shown by the graphite drawing of Boston's Jewish quarter and/or the woodcut of New York's Lower East Side.
 - 2) Families had to struggle to survive economically as shown by the photograph of Waiting for the "Forwards" which depicts children working at 1:15 am and/or the images from the Triangle Waist Company fire that show some Jewish women had to work in sweatshops where conditions were very bad.
 - 3) Jews could become prosperous in America especially when compared to their economic conditions in Europe as shown by the lithograph postcard *Next Year in America* and/or the title page of *A Boychik Up-to-Date*.
6. a) Which source shows that some immigrants were not allowed into the country? ***A Little Letter to Father*.**

b) Why do you think there was a song about this? **Answers will vary, but may mention that immigrant families might feel strongly about this since it is very painful for families to be separated. Many immigrants had this experience or knew people who had this experience.**



7. a) Identify sources that show how the government helped Jewish immigrants to become “more American.” **The posters in Yiddish and English advertising English classes.**

b) Identify sources that show how Jewish Americans tried to help new Jewish immigrants to become “more American.” ***What Every Woman Should Know about Citizenship, First Yiddish American Cookbook, the Bi-lingual Yiddish-English versions of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.***

c) Identify a source that is critical of becoming “more American.” ***A Boychick Up-to-Date.***
8. a) Why do you think Jewish American immigrants tried to become “more American?” **Answers will vary.**

b) What do you think it means to become “more American?” **Answers will vary.**

c) Do you think trying to become “more American” is a good thing? Why or why not? **Answers will vary.**
9. Who was Einstein? Why did he immigrate to America? **Einstein was the physicist who developed the theory of relativity. He immigrated to America because Jews were in great danger after Hitler gained power in Germany.**
10. Why do you think Jewish immigrants composed patriotic songs in Yiddish? Try to explain both why they would compose patriotic songs and why they would sing them in Yiddish. **Answers will vary but might mention that Jewish immigrants genuinely valued and felt passionately about the freedom and opportunity that America provided and thus expressed their sentiments through music in the language that was most familiar to them.**

