

## Part 1: Warm Up



- 1) How do you think the people in this picture feel?
- 2) What might they be thinking?
- 3) Where is Ellis Island?
- 4) What happened to immigrants at Ellis Island?

## Part 2: Ellis Island Reading

Ellis Island, at the mouth of the Hudson River in New York Harbor, is the location of what was from January 1, 1892, until November 12, 1954 the main entry facility for immigrants entering the United States called the Ellis Island Immigrant Station. It is situated in Jersey City, New Jersey and New York City. The federal immigration station opened on January 1, 1892 and was closed on November 12, 1954, but not before 12 million immigrants were inspected there by the US Bureau of Immigration (Immigration and Naturalization Service). 1907 was the peak year for immigration at Ellis Island with 1,004,756 immigrants processed. The all-time daily high also occurred this year on April 17 which saw a total of 11,747 immigrants arrive.

Those with visible health problems or diseases were sent home or held in the island's hospital facilities for long periods of time. Then they were asked 29 questions including name, occupation, and the amount of money they carried with them. Generally those immigrants who were approved spent from two to five hours at Ellis Island. However, more than three thousand would-be immigrants died on Ellis Island while being held in the hospital facilities. Some unskilled workers and immigrants were rejected outright because they were considered "likely to become a public charge (welfare)." About 2 percent were denied admission to the U.S. and sent back to their countries of origin for reasons such as chronic contagious disease, criminal background, or insanity. Ellis Island was sometimes known as "The Island of Tears" or "Heartbreak Island" because of those 2% who were not admitted after the long trans-atlantic voyage.

Symbols were chalked on the clothing of potentially sick immigrants following the six-second medical examination. The doctors would look at them as they climbed the stairs from the baggage area up to the Great Hall. Immigrants' behavior would be studied for difficulties in getting up the staircase. Some only entered the country by secretly wiping the chalk marks off or by turning their clothes inside out.

Writer Louis Adamic came to America from Slovenia in southeastern Europe in 1913. Adamic described the night he spent on Ellis Island. He and many other immigrants slept on bunk beds in a huge hall. Lacking a warm blanket, the young man "shivered, sleepless, all night, listening to snores" and dreams "in perhaps a dozen different languages". The facility was so large that the dining room could seat 1,000 people.

Mass processing of immigrants at Ellis Island ended in 1924 after the Immigration Act of 1924 greatly restricted immigration and allowed processing at overseas embassies. After this time Ellis Island became primarily a detention and deportation processing center.

Today Ellis Island houses a museum reachable by ferry from Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey and from the southern tip of Manhattan in New York City. The Statue of Liberty, sometimes thought to be on Ellis Island because of its symbolism as a welcome to immigrants, is actually on nearby Liberty Island, which is about ½ mile to the south.

More than 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. The first immigrant to pass through Ellis Island was Annie Moore, a 15-year-old girl from County Cork, Ireland, on January 1, 1892. She and her two brothers were coming to America to meet their parents, who had moved to New York two years prior. She received a greeting from officials and a \$10.00 gold piece. The last person to pass through Ellis Island was a Norwegian merchant seaman by the name of Arne Peterssen in 1954. Today, over 100 million Americans can trace their ancestry to the immigrants who first arrived in America through the island before dispersing to points all over the country.

1. Why do you think Ellis Island was called the "Island of Tears" or "Heartbreak Island?"

2. Why do you think the Immigration Act was passed?



## Life of Immigrants

**“The Streets are not paved with gold- they aren’t paved at all, and I’m expected to pave them!”**

- 1) Explain what the statement above means.
- 2) How did America of the late nineteenth/early 20<sup>th</sup> century measure up to immigrant’s expectations?
- 3) What was typical work and housing like for immigrants of the late nineteenth century?

Look at one of the following video clips

- [Immigration in the 1900-1920s](#)
- [Tenement Life 1860-1910](#)

Watch [Tenement Museum](#) and a [Look Inside the Lower Eastside Tenement](#)

Opened in 1992, the Tenement Museum is located at 97 Orchard St fronts still operated on the bottom floors. Shuttered from use and left to decay, the top floors were (and continue to be) renovated by the museum to offer a glimpse into immigrant history. [http://www.tenement.org/Virtual\\_Tour/index\\_virtual.html](http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/index_virtual.html)

Watch the Video clip: [Tenement Life Through the Eyes of Jacob Riis](#)

Or Search Google for Jacob Riis Tenements. Look at images and wikipedia

- 4) What are tenements?
- 5) What did tenements look like?
- 6) Who lived in tenements? on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Built in 1863, the top 5 floors of the building were condemned in the 1930's while store
- 7) What was life like in a Tenement apartment?
- 8) What challenges did immigrant families face and how did they overcome them?

### [Jacob Riis Tenement Images](#)

Choose one image that makes an impact on you. Choose one person in the image to ‘become’. Ask yourself-

1. What do I see?
2. What do I feel?
3. What do I think?

### Part 6: Tenement Virtual Tour

Go to [http://www.tenement.org/Virtual\\_Tour/index\\_virtual.html](http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/index_virtual.html) Choose one of the apartments and read about the people that lived there. You can listen to the audio of the people, but you don't have to.

Family Name	Place of Origin + why they immigrated to America	Family size/members and jobs of each	Dates at 97 Orchard St
Describe one hardship the family faced	How did the family survive/overcome this hardship?	Item in apartment that represents the family and why	Why did the family leave Orchard St?

### Letter Home

You have now gone through the journey to America. You need to write to your family and friends back home telling them what has occurred. Some of them have not even heard why you left in the first place- you will need to explain your decision. This letter should be an 'open' letter to your family and friends- these were common in the ninetieth and early twentieth century. They would be sent to the local parish priest, reverend or rabbi or the head of your family at home to be read to family, friends, or the congregation. Your letter should explain:

- Why you left home
- The process you went through at the steamship company
- The boat trip to America
- Ellis Island and your experience there
- What happened to members of your family during the inspection process
- What decisions your family had to make
- What decisions your family is facing now that you are in NYC (or, let them know you are coming back home)

Would you recommend immigration, based on what you have experienced so far? Why or why not?

### Part 3 : Video



- 1) Why did many immigrants decide to leave their native countries?
- 2) Where did most immigrants come from?
- 3) How long was the trip across the ocean?
- 4) What factors made them decide to come to the United States?
- 5) What was the journey like for steerage passengers?
- 6) What factors might prohibit entry to the United States?
- 7) What was the purpose of Ellis Island?
- 8) What did they try to figure out during the line inspection?
- 9) In what ways did the decisions made at Ellis Island impact families?
- 10) Why did people dislike immigrants?
- 11) What decisions had to be made after leaving Ellis Island?
- 12) What was the Quota?
- 13) What was the National Origins Act?
- 14) What happened to Ellis Island?
- 15) Where did most people settle?
- 16) What was essential for them to learn?
- 17) What damaged the ceiling?
- 18) What is Ellis Island used for now?

