



To Be Somebody in America: Ellis Island Immigrants Tell Their Stories

Teacher Guide



4.07



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On the cover:

Arriving at Ellis Island. Photograph marked with number 5252. Property of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior.



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What Every Teacher Needs to Know

We welcome your class to the **National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center!**

Program Location: The program takes place at the NPNH Education Center on Staten Island, a fully accessible site located on the third floor of the old Army barracks at 210 New York Avenue in Fort Wadsworth. Classes can eat lunch either at our **Learning Lunchroom**, where children learn about recycling, or at an outdoor picnic area. (**Food, vending machines, microwaves and refrigerators are *not* available.**)

Cancellation Policy: If your plans change, please contact U.S. *as early as possible*.

Teacher and Chaperon Roles: In our program, *everyone participates*—including teachers and chaperons! You are *essential* to the success of this program. That is why we **REQUIRE one adult for every six to eight students** to attend with your class. Please give chaperons the **Chaperon Job Description**, found on the left side of this folder, prior to the day of the trip.

Questions: Please contact us at (718) 354 – 4530, extension 300. We also welcome email. A business card is provided in this packet with a Park Ranger’s name, number and email address.



Program Overview and Objectives

Overview

In this program, *To Be Somebody in America: Ellis Island Immigrants Tell Their Stories*, students read edited oral histories from immigrants who passed through Ellis Island Immigration Station from 1892 until it was closed in 1954. Teams of students then perform dramatic skits based on the personal stories of these immigrants. Activities are deeply rooted both in social studies and in language arts curriculum and standards.

Essential Question

What are the elements of a successful immigration experience to the U.S.?

Objectives

Students who participate in the program and activities (pre- and post-visit) will be able to:

- List circumstances and personal characteristics that make an immigration experience successful or unsuccessful.
- List at least three requirements for immigrants to enter the U.S. via Ellis Island.
- Compare and contrast experiences between two or more immigrants.
- Create and perform a short dramatic performance based on an oral history.
- Use a graphic organizer to understand a text.



On-Site Program Description

This program requires two visits, each lasting 90 minutes.

Both visits *require* students and teachers to *complete pre-visit activities*. Your on-site visits will be rewarding and successful *only* if these pre-visit activities are completed at school before your arrival.

This program is based on powerful *primary sources*—oral histories by Ellis Island immigrants themselves. Transcripts have been edited to make them shorter and easier to read, but they are the real words of real participants in history. Reading oral histories not only exposes students to rare primary sources, but enhances literacy skills as well.

Reading these primary sources also makes history personal. Each immigrant had his or her own motivation for coming to the United States in the early 20th century. Usually their motives were complex: escaping persecution, war or economic hardship, wanting more personal freedom or more political rights. Students develop an appreciation that personal choices are always intertwined with history—indeed, that their own choices are intertwined with today’s current events.

What is an oral history?

Oral histories are interviews where people tell their own stories in their own words. The Oral History Project at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum began in 1973 and continues to this day. Nearly 2000 immigrants have given interviews so far. Most were processed through Ellis Island. Many have passed on, but their stories survive thanks to this project.

On your first visit, students will learn basic dramatic performance skills. In teams, they will create improvised dramatic sketches based on an edited oral history by an Ellis Island immigrant, which students read in class before their visit (see “Pre-Visit Activity” section).

On your second visit, teams of students will give dramatic performances based on oral histories by different Ellis Island immigrants. Teachers can select oral histories based on their students’ reading levels, parts of the world the class may be studying or by particular topics.

After each team has performed in front of the class, we will revisit the essential question: *What are the elements of a successful immigration experience to the U.S.?* What elements made the experiences of some immigrants more successful than others? Which of the immigrants would they rank as “successful” or “unsuccessful”? How might this compare to what immigrants experience today?



Summary, Pre- and Post-Visit Activities; Classroom Extensions

Required Pre-Visit Activity: *Oral History by Doukenie Bacos* (page 9)

A few weeks before your first visit, we will supply you with copies of an edited oral history by Doukenie Bacos (Doo-KEN-nee BAH-kos), a woman of Greek ethnicity who immigrated to the United States as a teenager in 1921. **Students must read this *in class, before their first visit to the Center.*** When you visit, students will use this oral history to **create and perform short dramatic skits.** Students will be much more confident and excited in their performances if they understand Doukenie’s story.

Optional Pre-Visit Activity: *The Immigrant Who Ran Ellis Island* (pp. 10-13)

This handout builds student understanding of immigration to the U.S. during the period that Ellis Island was used as an immigration station (1892-1954). Edward Corsi was ten years old when he and his family immigrated through Ellis Island from Italy in 1907. In 1931, he was named to head the Ellis Island Immigration Station, the first immigrant chosen for the position.

Between Your Visits: Students Create Dramatic Performances (pp. 13-14)

Teams of students will create their own dramatic performances, based on edited oral histories by Ellis Island immigrants. Again, they must read an oral history. Better yet, read two. We have paired oral histories for **comparison and contrast**, a skill required in state Language Arts tests.

Since student dramatic performances can be hard to follow, we recommend that students become familiar with all oral histories used by the class. Students can read all the oral histories or teams can report about “their” immigrant to the class. The **graphic organizers**, located on the last page of each oral history, can help them tell the class about their immigrant’s story.

Students combine their reading comprehension skills with dramatic techniques learned during their first visit and any optional research about the immigrant’s country of origin to **create their own dramatic performances.** Teams of students should **write a script**, which can be used during their performance. **Rehearsing** the skit is also very helpful!

Post-Visit Activity: *Arriving at Ellis Island* (pp. 16-17)

This handout is a **primary source document** that describes an immigrant’s experience of Ellis Island. Our **Document-Based Questions (DBQs)** use a format similar to the DBQs found on state social studies tests. Students can answer the questions individually or in small groups.

Post-Visit Extension: *Original Historical Research* (pp. 18-21)

Students can find out more about immigrants through their own research of primary documents. *Ship manifests* can be found online, while *petitions for naturalization* and *declarations of intention* require visiting local National Archives offices. We tell you how.

Post-Visit Extension: *Create a Student Oral History Project* (page 22)

Reading an oral history makes history real for students. An even richer experience is for students to conduct their own oral history interviews with a subject. Gathering oral histories also helps students gain both content and skills in a rewarding, provocative manner.



Vocabulary of Immigration Terms

- Alien:** A person from another country who does not have the rights of a *citizen*
- Citizen:** A person who has all the rights and freedoms of a country—to work, vote, etc.
- Deportation:** Removal of an *alien* from a country, often because they arrived illegally
- Depression:** A time of low wages and few jobs. The *Great Depression* started in 1929.
- Emigration:** To leave one’s country forever
- Greenhorn:** (*Insult*) An *immigrant* not familiar with the ways of his or her new country
- Immigration:** To move permanently to a new country. People who do this are *immigrants*.
- Literacy:** Being able to read and write. After 1917, required for alien men entering the U.S.
- Passport:** A document that allows a person to enter and leave a foreign country
- Pogrom:** Attacks against Jewish communities in Russia during the 1800s-early 1900s
- Quarantine:** (*verb*) To isolate a sick person in order to stop a contagious disease from spreading. (*noun*) A place for sick people, to keep them from spreading disease.
- Quota:** Any limit, set by law
- Quota laws:** Laws passed in the 1920s to restrict immigration based on nationality
- Settlement house:** A place that offers services for *immigrants*—classes, sports, job counseling
- Ship manifest:** A list of passengers on a ship. Includes name, age, destination, place of origin.
- Steerage:** “Third-class” passengers on a ship who traveled below deck in crowded rooms
- Tenement:** An apartment building with low standards of health, safety and comfort
- Trachoma:** A very contagious eye infection that can lead to blindness if not treated.
- Vermin:** Small, harmful insects, such as fleas or lice, that thrive in unsanitary conditions
- Visa:** A document that allows a person to go to the border of a country and ask an immigration officer for permission to enter.



Vocabulary of Dramatic Terms

These definitions came from students who had visited the NPNH Education Center. Try to blend these elements into your dramatic performance.

Actors	People who portray a character
Audience	The people who watch a dramatic performance (a play or a movie)
Blocking/staging	How an actor uses their body onstage, especially in relation to other actors
Cast	All the actors in a performance
Character	The role an actor takes on during a performance
Costumes/makeup	Clothes, jewelry—anything worn by actors to help them play a character
Cues	Reminders to do something at a specific moment during a performance
Gesture	A physical movement, like waving hello or carrying a suitcase
Lighting	Uses light to focus attention on an actor or part of a stage
Motivation/feeling	What makes the character do certain things on stage, like making a certain gesture or talking in a particular tone of voice
Music/sound effects	Sounds that help set the mood of a performance—say, birds singing—or that help advance the plot, such as a gunshot
Plot	The basic plan of a story or dramatic piece (example: Rich man dresses up as a bat and avenges his parents' death by fighting crime.)
Props	Things used on stage to help set the mood or advance the plot (example: a vase with flowers on a table; a suitcase)
Script	A written text with the lines of all actors, plus stage directions
Stage/set	The place where the dramatic performance takes place, which helps define time and location of the drama using scenery, etc.
Stage directions	Cues on where to move or what gestures to make on stage (examples: exit stage left; pretending to chew gum)



Pre-Visit Activity 1: The Oral History of Doukenie Bacos

Before your first visit to the Center, all students must read the oral history of Doukenie Bacos (Doo-KEH-nee BAH-kos, below). The success of the first program depends upon students being familiar with the life of this immigrant when they first walk in the door.

Doukenie Bacos immigrated to the United States in 1920-21 at the age of 15. A woman of Greek ethnicity, she left her family's home in Turkey for many reasons. Her oral history reveals a determined, intelligent and underage immigrant who overcame many obstacles. Oddly, her story ends at the climax, when she faces a bleak choice: marry one of her uncle's middle-aged friends or return home in failure. "Sell myself?" she asks the interviewer. "I would rather drown." National Park Service park rangers have recently uncovered what happened to her—as you will find out during your first visit to the Center!



Photo: Bacos/Bazaco Family

- As students read, they should jot down answers to the questions that divide each section. They can do this either individually or as a group, depending upon reading level. **NOTE:** Questions at the start of the oral history tend to be the easiest. As you get closer to the end, questions get more abstract and require a higher reading and comprehension level.
- Discuss Doukenie's story in class. (You may want to write some highlights on the board.)
 - The circumstances and reason(s) *why Doukenie left for America*.
 - The events that happened on her *journey to America*.
 - The events that happened to her *at Ellis Island*.
 - Have students *predict* what happened at the end. Did Doukenie have to marry one of her uncle's friends? If not, what do you think she did instead? Do you think she had a successful immigration experience, or not?
- As a class, fill out the **graphic organizer** on the last page. Although graphic organizers are used in New York state language arts tests, students may be unfamiliar with this tool.
 - Fill in the blanks at the top of the page—her country of origin (Turkey); her age when she immigrates.
 - What led her to decide to go to America? (New York state standards call this *push-pull*.) She gives several reasons. These go in the boxes on top of the page.
 - Her decision to go to America is already on the graphic organizer.
 - What happens to her *at Ellis Island*? (She does not get to leave right away. Why not?)
 - What happens *after her arrival*? At first, she thinks her life is going according to plan. But her uncle changes her plans. List these events in the boxes at the bottom of the page.

DOUKENIE BABAYANIE BACOS

Birth Date: December 18, 1904.

Interview EI-049 by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. on May 23, 1991.

Immigrated from Thrace, Turkey, at the age of 15.

Arrived January 5, 1921 on the *King Alexander* from Piraeus, Greece.

Since 1973, the **Oral History Project** at **Ellis Island Immigration Museum** has interviewed over 2000 immigrants. Oral histories are interviews where all sorts of people, from factory workers to movie stars, tell *their* stories in their own words.

As you read, **answer the questions** in the boxes below. You will discuss them later in class. Think about what materials, skills and personality traits might be needed for a **successful immigration experience**.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are here on Ellis Island with Doukenie Bacos [doo-KEH-nee BAH-kos], a Turkish subject who left from [Thrace, near modern Greece and Bulgaria] in 1919 when she was fifteen years old. [NOTE: This is an error. She left December 22, 1920 and arrived January 5, 1921.] Where were you born?

BACOS: I was born in [a town called] Saranda Klisse. The name today is Kirk Klisse. The Turks, when they chased all the Greeks out of Saranda Klisse they named it Kirk Klisse. [Currently named Kirklareli, Turkey]



Doukenie (third from left)

Photo: Bacos/Bazaco Family

SIGRIST: May I ask you, geographically, where does this town lie? Where on the map? Did you say it was in Thrace before?

BACOS: Thrace. In Thrace. [Northwestern part of Turkey, near the capital Istanbul, which was formerly known as Constantinople.]

SIGRIST: What was the town like? What was it like? What did the town look like?

BACOS: Those days, all the whole town [had] forty thousand people—Turks, Greeks, Jewish and Bulgarians. We were mixed. (sighs) The Turks are not very progressive. The Greek life was very horrible. We used to live all the time in fear. Many times they used to try to steal girls so that they can turn them to Turks, and the Greeks are very religious. The Turks have different religion. They're Mohammedans [Moslems]. Greeks are [Christian] Orthodox. So always we lived in fear. You hear that they steal girls.

But when, in 1912, started the First World War, it started from Bulgaria. The Bulgarians marched in my country, and we thought Bulgarians would remain there. Being that they were Christians, we had hopes maybe we'd live a little bit better. But they stayed only nine months.

We suffered a lot from Bulgarians, too. In nine months they got all out and the Turks come back. This was around '15, '16. The Turks, when they used to sell us bread, they used to mix bread with sand, just to kill us. In school, they closed the schools for a while, and we couldn't go. But my father was very smart, and he was a self-made man. He used to teach us at home. Meanwhile, the Greeks came to my town, and they stayed only two years. In two years [the Turks returned] again, all the Greeks had to leave town and go scatter in Greece.

What ethnicity was Doukenie? What other ethnic groups lived in her hometown?

Doukenie accused the Turks of doing several things. List three.

[There] were only two little girls in the family. It's an honor to have a boy in the family, because the family is going to inherit the name. And many times I used to hear my father talking with my mother. "We have two beautiful girls. Only if we had a boy." [How were they] going to get help some day when [they] get older, because usually the boy take[s] care of the responsibilities of the family? As young as I was, I used to feel for my father and I used to tell him, "Don't worry, Dad. Someday I'll become your son, and I'm going to help you. Don't worry about the future."

Another thing used to hurt me a lot. [My parents] would take us to church every Sunday. And while we're walking friends from far away, they would see [us], and they would say [to my father], "Hey, Babayanie, your daughter is growing. Is going to be good for my son. But [then your] house is going to be mine." Father was well established. He had three houses. And that used to hurt me a lot. [My father] used to say [to me], "Don't worry, dear. God gave me two girls. God will provide for everything. You just don't worry." And I used to think at night, "Someday I have to go to America. I have to prove it. I have to become somebody so I can help my father."

Many times I used to go and see my aunt. Her daughter was well-married. And she put false teeth on her. And my father didn't have teeth. He didn't have money. And I used to say, "Auntie, can I see your teeth? Because some day I'm going to buy teeth for my father." That's how much I loved my father. I'll tell you. I don't know how much you believe in God, but believe in God. If God wants things to happen, [they] will happen. If He doesn't want, all, regardless how much you'll try, you won't be able to do it.

I was a very smart girl, and I was jumping classes. I [also] used to love to get American books [and] magazines, just to see how they lived. I used to see other people [who] used to come to America, and they used [to return] to help fix their [family's] house, help their parents, help their sisters and brothers.

SIGRIST: What did you expect out of America? What were your expectations?

BACOS: First I wanted freedom, because we weren't free there. The way I used to read books [about America], it was free life, hard life maybe. Oh, sometimes they used to write that they used to find money in the street, and I could never believe that. I was too intelligent to hear stories like this. But while I was going to school always I used to tell my friends, classmates,

“I'm going to go to America. I'm not going to stay here. There is no progress here.” What you are, you used to remain the same way. There wasn't foresight, there wasn't dreams to develop. The rich people remain rich. The poor people remain poor. It wasn't a chance for the poor people. I couldn't take it. I couldn't take that. We used to say that the doors from America are open, and [you] can come freely.

Why was it important to have a boy in Greek families? What does Doukenie seem to think of this part of her culture?

What did she mean when she told her father, “Someday I'll become your son?” (She does not mean it literally.)

What did she mean when she said, “There is no progress here [in Thrace]”?

Finally, in 1918, a man came and knocked [on] my door and I opened the door. And he said, “Where is your mother?” My mother had a brother in America that [she had lost track of]. I went and called my mother and [the man] said, “I brought you a letter from your brother.” He opened the letter and found a check for twenty-five dollars. At that time in 1918 it was a lot of money, twenty-five dollars. She was so happy. Not for the money, but that he was alive.

So in a few days I wrote [my uncle] a letter and I said to him, to thank him first for the money, and told him [about] my dream: I love to get out from here. I'm growing, Father will never be able to send me to Constantinople. After you finish the high school in Kirk Klisse, you have to go to Constantinople to finish. There we had to pay the teachers. But after the war, Father wasn't so rich like before. So I wrote everything, and I said, “If you only give me a chance to bring me to America to finish my schooling, because I hear in America [schools] are free.”

My uncle, I found out later, the same night that he got the letter, he was a gambler, a heavy gambler. He said, “We'll play one ticket for my niece.” And he won. He said, “Another play for the expenses.” And he won. I went to my father, oh, when I got the letter and the ticket in one month, I was so excited. And I went to my mother and I said, “Help. My ticket came.” And she was happy. When my father came back from work, I said, “Father, I got a ticket to go to America.” Every night that I was going to sleep, I would dream, anything I used to read, I would dream how I'm going to find America, how I'm going to go, how I'm going to try to become like the others, be somebody.

SIGRIST: So you were very anxious to get out of where you were.

BACOS: I was anxious. I wanted justice. I wanted a different life. I'll tell you. When my father came, I said to Father, “I got my tickets.” Three days I was begging him and I was telling him, “Dad, trust me. Trust me, Dad. Just let me. Give me a chance.”

He says, “Never a child of mine will go away from my arms. I went to Bulgaria and I know what I went through. Child, fifteen year old, never.” [Before Doukenie was born] My father had established a good business in Bulgaria, and he left his brother [in charge of the business] to see his mother. His brother sold [the] business, [took] the money, and left. When my father went

back they told him, “Your brother sold the business. He got everything.”

Meanwhile, I heard, around the corner was another family. And I heard that Effie got her tickets [for her] mother, son and daughter, to come to America. Without saying anything to my father or mother I went to my friend's house, and I said, “Effie, I heard you're going to America. Can you take me with you? I got my tickets, too.” Of course, Gregory, the brother, said to me, “Please, dear, Effie, let's [have Doukenie come with us]. We're going to have fun on the road.” And she said, “Okay, we'll take you.” This way I was secure that I was with family. I go back to my father and I ask him, “Would you allow me to go with [the] Floridis family?” Well, he thought and thought, and then he said, “Well, all right, as long as you're going with a family and not alone.”

And then he took me aside and gave me a lot of advice, and then at the end he said, “I know you're going to be desperate. One thing I'm asking you. Don't ever dirty my forehead. Don't ever let any man touch your hand. But, I'd rather see you drown than come back.” I said, “Dad, you have nothing to worry about. Just give me the chance to go.” Thinking that I'm going to come here, and I'll find everything the way I was dreaming, but it wasn't like this.

How did her letter to her uncle change Doukenie's life?

At first, Doukenie's father did not let her leave. What is the source of *conflict*, or disagreement? How did Doukenie solve this conflict?

What did her father mean when he told her, “Don't ever dirty my forehead”?

The day we got the train, the whole town was in the station to say goodbye. The door closed, and everybody was saying goodbye with their handkerchiefs. I looked at them, and I said, “Where am I going? What courage I have to start? Will I be able to do it?” And again, I said, “Well, you were asking yourself, you're asking God to give you the opportunity. Now you are on your own feet. You have to go through. You promise and you have to go through.”

My money weren't enough. When we came to Athens, we were living in a very poor hotel, in one room, the mother and daughter and the brother and me. The others went and signed their papers, their passports. Me, they didn't accept me because I was too young. I was desperate. From Athens we went to Piraeus. [The others] said to me, “What are you going to do?”

Next day early, I stood outside of the door, all alone. I don't know where I was finding this courage. Well, the man that came, the first man, to open the door, I hold his jacket and I said, “Please, mister. Mister, help me.” I went in, and I [told] him my story, that I have to go to America. I can't go back again. The whole dream that I had to go to school, it was America. “Please help me.” [While] I was talking, a man from Crete [came in]. He said, “Give me your papers,” and he signed the papers. So I came back. We had to wait forty days in that little room for the King Alexander because they had to make alterations. Time came, we got the King Alexander. It was a beautiful boat.

SIGRIST: Where were your accommodations on the boat? Where did you sleep?

BACOS: I slept with them, in one room. They were four decks. But after the mother got very sick, and instead of second class they wanted to, because they had money, they moved to first class, better cabin, and they brought [me to] where I was [with the] other three girls. Always I used to go to the deck and play mandolin. A few more girls found me, and they saw me. They said, “Why we can't play?” So we used to play.

Meanwhile, a Greek fellow was traveling, and he came one day and he said, it took thirteen days to come to America. He said, “Little one, do you know any other girls that they play mandolin?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “I'm thinking, being that the boat is for the first time traveling in America, I'm thinking to give a dance so that they can remember King Alexander. I'm going to give you some notes, and I want you to be up on the stage.” Ooh, I was so happy because I stood up on the stage. So the night came. We play[ed].

SIGRIST: So you were on the boat thirteen days. Was it a rough trip? Did you get sick?

BACOS: No, no. It was a beautiful boat, beautiful. When we came here, so happy that I am in America now. I saw the Statue of Liberty. And I said to myself, “Lady, you're such a beautiful. You opened your arms, and you get all the foreigners here. Give me a chance to prove that I am worth it, to do something, to become somebody in America.” Always that statue was in my mind. When I passed in front of this statue I was so enthusiastic. [But] After we got the boat to come to Ellis Island, they started mumbling about me. And I heard two elderly girls, and they said, “Maybe they're going to send you back.” Because already they heard that I was coming to my uncle, and I was underage.

Why didn't the authorities give her a passport?

What did she do to get on board ship to go to America?

Why did she fear that she would be sent back by immigration officials at Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Tell us what it was like to stay here for three days.

BACOS: My dear boy, I saw tears. I saw tears with happiness, but I saw tears with pain. They had to wait here, and they were living in an agony. Next to me [there] was an Italian woman with three children, and one of the child got sick. It was pneumonia. The child was coughing. And she was holding the child and singing. And all of a sudden, a doctor and two nurses came to take the child away. Now, she didn't know how to speak [English]. They're talking to her [In English]. After [a while] I realized what they were saying, that the child has to go to the hospital. And they took the child from her arms, and she was crying, because it's not easy to take your child without knowing what they're doing. I was crying with her, too.

As I said, I saw many people, [who] were waiting, and then the parents came, or the brothers came, and they were so happy. And me, I was remaining back. For me, it was just like very hard, small road with thorns. Would I be able to pass those thorns and get out to go to America, or they have to set me back again? I cry. I cry all night.

SIGRIST: You must have been very frightened.

BACOS: [But] I had courage. I had real courage, and I was praying. I was praying so hard. They gave us food. There were big men that always, in the morning, [tell us], “Come on, come on.” It was Irish people who were guards. And they used to go, “Come on, come on.” Like lambs we used to go upstairs to the rooms to sleep. But still, the pain was in me. I couldn't enjoy nothing, being that I was afraid they were going to send me back. I was dreaming if they send me back, before I go to the other boat, I'm going to fall into the river and die. I couldn't go back any more. I had dreams. I promise everybody that someday I'm going to come back and you'll see me different.

Finally, the third day, they came to take me. The agent said, “Don't worry. You're going to go to the island, and from there your uncle is going to come and pick you. But never mention anything [about being] underage.” They investigated that he was a bachelor, and I wasn't allowed to go into bachelor's hands alone, and he had to find a family to place me there. The same night when we came my uncle comes with another woman. He said, “This is your aunt.” Usually the Greeks, to a strange woman they call “aunt.” “You're going to stay with them.” He was helping. But [for] three days I had to stay here.

What was the real reason that immigration officials did not let her uncle take her off Ellis Island right away?

What did she mean when she said that “the pain was in me” during her time at Ellis Island?

How did her uncle solve the conflict with immigration officials so he could get Doukenie off the island?

My uncle, as I said, he was a gambler. He didn't have a lot of money. We came by subway to go to the house. A whole week, I think it was Christmas week, I didn't go out. Finally, a week later, the [woman] I used to call aunt said to me, “We're going to go and visit somebody.” I said, “Do they have girls?” She said, “No, but they have boys.” In fact, from that day, any place we used to go, they would invite me. Usually the Greeks makes dances. Every weekend you'll go to a Greek dance.

When we opened the door I saw one big table, around about seven boys. A boy [was sitting] on top [of a] laundry tub. The minute he saw me, he said, “This spring chicken will be for me.” Everybody started laughing. He was already five years in America. These were the first English words that I learned: “This spring chicken will be for me.” I was embarrassed because I thought something is wrong with me.

Now I started to go to school. I spoke good French, and I could immediately pick the words, the English, only with French accent. But in no time I start to progress. The first day they put me in the eighth class. Problems, I could do. But the books that they gave me I couldn't read.

One day, my uncle comes and says, “I won't be able to send you to school any more.” Already I

went to school three months. I said, “Why?” My dream was to come to America to go to school, to go to become a doctor and show my compatriots what I could do. He said, “I lost all my money. Ten thousand dollars in one night.” He gambled. I said, “Now what?” He said, “There are two ways. Either you have to go back, [or] you have to get married.”

[His friends] knew that he was broke. They were asking him, “What's she going to do? Is she going to stay here, or is she going to go back?” Because those days the Greeks, they didn't have Greek girls around, and they used to bargain [for brides]: “I have so much [money for a bride], I have so much.” So my uncle says, “There are many Greeks that they want to get married. Forty years old, fifty years old. They have business, they have four mink coats.”

I said, “Me, to sell myself?” Never. I'd rather go back, I'd rather drown myself. Never I had money in mind. But I managed to have money all the time. Give in to money, never.

What conflict did she have with her uncle at the end? What did she think of the choices he gave her?

In your opinion, how much should we trust what the uncle told her? Why *did* he pay for her ticket to the U.S.? Think about it.

Predict how you think her conflict with her uncle ended. Did she have to marry one of her uncle's friends? Did she ever get to become a doctor?



Photo: Bacos/Bazaco Family

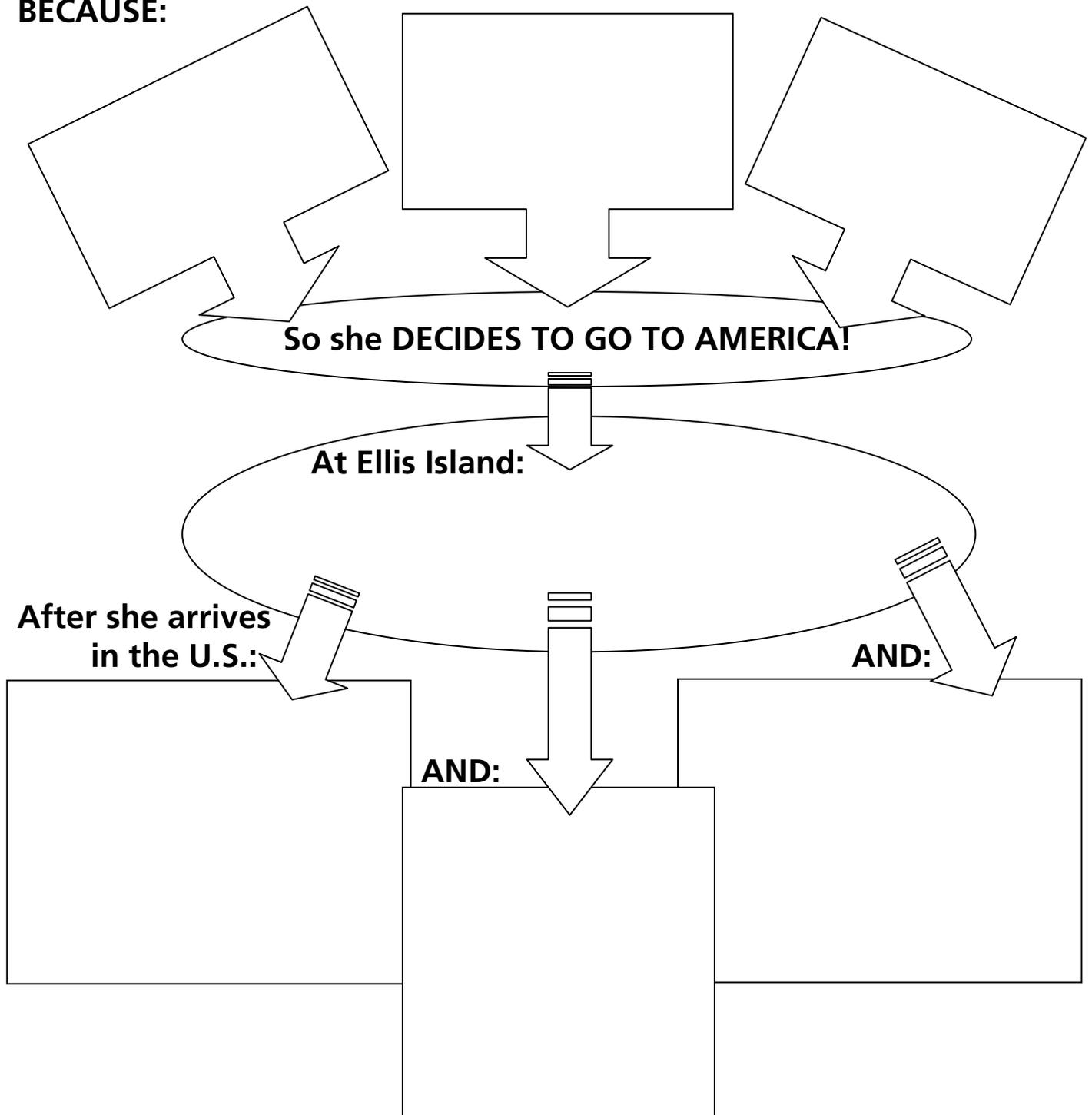
GRAPHIC ORGANIZER for Ellis Island Oral History

NAME of immigrant: **DOUKENIE BACOS** **FROM:** _____

YEAR she came to the U.S.: _____ **AGE** upon arrival: _____

PUSH-PULL: Why did she choose to leave home and come to America?

BECAUSE:





Between-Visit Activity: *Turning Oral Histories into Theatre*

For your second visit, students will create and perform dramatic pieces based on other oral histories. We strongly recommend that students read at least one other oral history in addition to the one they will use for their performance.

As the teacher, **you get to select what oral histories might interest your students** the most. There are two ways to make this selection:

- 1) By a **common theme**. We have paired oral histories so that teams of students can **compare or contrast experiences of two immigrants**. (Students would have to read both oral histories or report out to each other.) Comparison and contrast is a skill demanded on statewide tests.
- 2) By **country of origin**. Classes with students from the West Indies, for example, might especially appreciate the struggles of Vera Clarke Ifill, who immigrated from Barbados.

Regardless, **you must choose your oral histories *before the day of your first visit***. We will make sure to have copies **ready for you to take back to school**.

Common Themes for Comparison and Contrast

THEME	IMMIGRANTS
American-born children “re-immigrate” with parents	Barondess & Hallgren
Americanization	Winnick & Nerstad; also Hallgren & Gordon
Back and forth between old and new countries	Hallgren & Herbert
Detention and deportation	Heinemann & Hallgren; also Frkovich & Monzone
Dividing families at Ellis Island	Hallgren & Monzone; also Hallgren & Herbert
Encounters with prejudice (race and religion)	Ifill & Steen
Escaping war zones, divided loyalties	Gordon & Barondess; also Frkovich & Lew
Getting into U.S., legally vs. illegally	Lew & Heinemann; also Barondess & Frkovich
Illness (physical and mental) and possible deportation	Calloway & Hallgren
Learning English	Lew & Winnick
Reasons for leaving (compelling vs. not-so-compelling)	Myers & Nelson
Saying the wrong thing at the wrong time	Monzone & Heinemann

Oral Histories by Nation of Origin and Year of Immigration

FROM	IMMIGRANT	YEAR	COMPELLING STORY
AUSTRIA	Nelly Ratner Myers	1940	Deaf Jewish girl escapes the Holocaust
BARBADOS	Vera Clarke Ifill	1921	Black immigrant faces poverty, prejudice
CHINA	Gem Hoy "Harry" Lew	1951	Waits at Ellis Island two months to join family
CROATIA	Paul Frkovich	1950	Illegally enters U.S.; bicycles from Argentina
GERMANY	Otto Heinemann	1930, 1933	Twice enters U.S. illegally, once as stowaway escaping Nazi officials
IRELAND	Mary Margaret Mullins Gordon	1925	Good description of Irish Civil War and processing through Ellis Island
IRELAND	Emanuel "Manny" Steen	1925	Denied a job in the U.S. because of his religion
ITALY	Josephine Gazieri Calloway	1922	Spends a year at Ellis Island's hospital for treatment of her <i>trachoma</i>
ITALY	Leo Monzone	1921	Illiterate brother denied entry to U.S.
LEBANON	Richard Herbert	1913	Mother and children escape from father to U.S.
SWEDEN	Linnea Hallgren	1924	"Feeble-minded" sister denied entry to U.S.
SWEDEN	Lisia Oslund Nelson	1921	Immigrates because she fears failing a test
UKRAINE (RUSSIA/POLAND)	Barbara Barondess	1921	Jewish family escapes <i>pogroms</i> , revolution
UKRAINE (POLAND)	Mary Slobojian Nerstad	1922	Americanization eased by kind teachers
UKRAINE (ROMANIA)	Louis Winnick	1922	Knowledge of English forces him into almost a parental role for Yiddish-speaking parents

Map Activity

Student teams should find the immigrant's country of origin on a world map. Teams should also find any other countries mentioned as part of the journey to the U.S., including catching a ship in another country. Example: Paul Frkovich escaped from Croatia to Italy, sailed to Argentina, then *bicycled* from Buenos Aires to Mexico and entered the U.S. illegally!

Before their performance on the second visit, teams will be required to show the class the journey of "their" immigrant to the U.S. on a map. (For some immigrants, this may include deportation and re-entry.)



Preparing for Your Dramatic Performance

During your first visit to the National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center, you have learned some of the craft of acting. You have already turned one oral history into a dramatic performance. What do you do to prepare for your next performance at the Education Center?

1. You will become *experts* about the immigrant whose oral history you received at the end of your first visit to the Education Center. *Read the oral history more than once.* Answer the questions as you go along.
2. Meet as a group to *discuss your answers to the questions.* Make sure that everyone has a solid understanding of what happened to this immigrant and why, based on the oral history. The **graphic organizer** may also help your group organize your thoughts.
3. Now the creative part: your group will tell the story of your immigrant to the rest of the class by *turning your oral history into a five-minute dramatic performance.* Not all parts of the story are equally important, so focus most of your time on the topic you think is most important for *this* story. That means you will need to cut less important parts of the story.
4. *Try out the theatrical elements* you learned during your first visit. Have fun with it!

- Try including a **narrator** who can explain what's happening to the audience.
- What **roles** should each person play?
- What **gestures** or **facial expressions** will help you tell the story with emotion?
- How can **lighting, sound effects, costumes** help you tell your story?
- Feel free to **do your own research** about your immigrant's homeland and culture.
- Finally, **write a script** that everyone can read during your performance. (You may need to hand this in to your teacher at the end of your performance.)

5. *Practice, practice, practice!* Here's an idea: practice in front of another group. This gets rid of the giggles and makes your performance sharper. Then *you* watch while *they* practice. Share *constructive* comments. Treat people with the same respect that you expect from others.

- Are you **facing the audience** when you speak? (If not, they can't hear you!)
- Are you **speaking loud enough** for everyone in the audience to hear?
- Practicing in front of peers, over and over, helps **get rid of the giggles.**
- Is your performance running **too long**, or **too short**?

6. If you get stuck or have questions, don't be shy! *Let your teacher know.* Good luck!



Pre-Visit Activity 2: The Immigrant Who Ran Ellis Island

This handout builds student understanding of immigration to the U.S. during the period that Ellis Island was used as an immigration station (1892-1954). **Edward Corsi** was a child when he and his family immigrated through Ellis Island from Italy in 1907. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover selected him to head the Ellis Island Immigration Station, the first Ellis Island immigrant ever chosen for the position.

Corsi's experience allows students to learn about the two sides of Ellis Island's history: first, as an immigration station that welcomed millions of aliens; later, primarily as a deportation station.

From 1892 to 1924, America placed few limits on immigration. However, even in the peak years, not everyone could enter the U.S. Laws restricted criminals, anarchists, the illiterate, people with serious medical infirmities and the "feeble-minded." Corsi's colleague, Frank Martocci, describes immigration through Ellis Island at that time from an inspector's point of view.

After the passage of the **Quota Laws of 1921** and the **National Origins Act of 1924**, immigration through Ellis Island declined precipitously, but illegal immigration increased. More and more, Ellis Island became a place to process potential deportees, rather than to welcome new arrivals to America. When Corsi headed the immigration station, he enforced these laws and witnessed their impact on immigrants and their families.

Corsi resigned his job in 1934. For someone whose political idol was Theodore Roosevelt, he found the work at Ellis Island not challenging enough. Corsi continued to be active in making conditions better for the poor of New York. In the 1950s he ran for mayor as a Republican, but was defeated.

As an immigrant himself, Corsi had strong opinions about the change in our immigration laws. He especially found deportation laws as heartless, yet it was his job to enforce them. Students can discuss whether or not Corsi made the right choice—enforcing laws he did not like—or if he should have quit his job sooner than he did.

The Immigrant Who Ran Ellis Island

From the deck of the *Florida*, ten-year-old Edward Corsi thought he saw mountains. He and his brother Giuseppe wondered why these mountains did not have snow, like the ones back in Italy. Their stepfather told them that they were not mountains but tall buildings—skyscrapers. Most grownups were looking at the Statue of Liberty, which came ever closer. But Edward’s mother was not looking at anything. She was crying—worried that the family did not have enough money to enter the U.S. after their two-week journey from Naples, Italy.

Once they arrived on Ellis Island, Edward’s family might have met Inspector Frank Martocci. He spoke English, German, French, Spanish and Polish as well as his native Italian. “From nine... in the morning to nine in the evening, we were continuously examining *aliens*,” Martocci remembered about those peak years of immigration through Ellis Island. “From three to five thousand people came before U.S. [every day]. I myself examined from four to five hundred a day.”

Many were women and children, who needed a married male family member to claim them. Otherwise they could not enter the country. Loved ones would meet at the “Kissing Post.” But sometimes a husband, father or uncle could not be located. In those cases, Martocci explained, “The poor alien, despite all her tears, had to be returned to her native country.” The law did not allow for mercy.



Inspection at Ellis Island. Photo: National Park Service (NPS).

Overcrowding on the island also helped spread *vermin* and disease. Martocci said he often came home with lice on his uniform. They were usually on his left side—the side where an alien would stand next to him during a *Board of Special Inquiry*. This Board made the final judgment on troublesome cases. People with certain diseases, like *trachoma*, were usually sent back. So were criminals, anarchists, illiterate men, the “feeble-minded” and anyone who might become a “public charge.”



Tenement on Manhattan’s East Side. Photo: New York Public Library.

Immigration officials took sick aliens to the hospital immediately. This often caused fear and misunderstandings. When 48 “Gypsy” [Roma] children were taken to the hospital for measles, a rumor started that the doctors had drowned the children. Parents threw shoes and curses at officials until one of the parents was brought to the hospital to see the children.

At the time, Edward Corsi knew none of this. All six family members passed inspection and moved into “four sordid *tenement* rooms” in Harlem’s Little Italy. Their only outside window “looked down on a dingy street.” Corsi was one of 1,285,349 aliens to enter the U.S. in 1907—a record that stood until 1990. (See <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/>) Every year between 1900 and 1910, an average of 200,000 immigrants arrived in the U.S. just from Italy alone.



Aliens being deported to Italy. Library of Congress.

In 1931, Corsi became the first immigrant ever to run Ellis Island Immigration Station. He returned to the island for the first time since 1907. Inspector Frank Martocci still worked there. The two Italian immigrants met and shared experiences.

By 1931, the island was much quieter than in 1907. Congress had passed the **Quota Laws of 1921** and the **National Origins Act of 1924**. These laws set strict limits on the number of people who could enter the country, but they did not treat all aliens equally. Britain, Ireland and Germany the largest *quotas* of all. Italy was allowed only 5,666 immigrants per year.

As a result, Corsi ran the island when it mainly held aliens who might be *deported*. Some aliens “stowed away upon ships, living . . . for days and nights upon bread and water.” Others hid “in bales of Canadian hay or crates of Mexican freight.” Corsi had to enforce a law he hated. “Our deportation laws are . . . in many cases inhuman. I have seen families separated—mothers torn from their children, husbands from their wives, and . . . not even the President himself able to prevent it.”

Corsi believed immigration had enriched American society. “We would have been limited in national character... had we all been New England Puritans,” he said. “We needed our immigrants from Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain and other parts of the world . . . to mould U.S. into the Nation that we are.”

All quotes are from *In the Shadow of Liberty: A Chronicle of Ellis Island* by Edward Corsi, Macmillan & Co., 1935.

QUESTIONS:

Compare and contrast the role of Ellis Island between the time when Edward Corsi arrived in America (1907) and when he was chosen as head of immigration at Ellis Island (1931).

The oral histories describe Ellis Island from an immigrant’s perspective. How did Martocci’s stories about working at Ellis Island as an inspector change your opinion of the immigration station?

Why did some Americans want to restrict immigration during the 1920s? Why would *quotas*, which restrict immigrants by the country they came from, appeal to some Americans?

For his parents, America offered only hardship. Years later, his mother sailed “back to Italy in desperation to die.” But for Edward, America offered success when he walked into a neighborhood *settlement house*. Haarlem House had a gym, club rooms and a library. It offered classes in English for poor immigrants and even summer vacations for tenement children. The staff encouraged Edward in his studies. He earned a law degree, then devoted his life to helping the needy—starting by working at Haarlem House.

Steps to Immigration at Ellis Island

- Aliens tagged with their number from the *ship manifest* (a list of all the ship’s passengers).
- Inspectors checked vaccination card and asked questions, checking the answers against the *ship manifest*: name, age, occupation, place of birth, last place of residence, friends or relatives in the US. Suspicious people or *illiterate* men were set aside.
- Medical inspection: People with possible diseases were marked with chalk on their clothing and taken for further tests. Sick people were *quarantined*.
- Immigrant showed inspectors their passport and money, which was exchanged for U.S. dollars.
- Immigrant rode the ferry to Manhattan.

From *Quarantine Sketches*, Maltine Co., Brooklyn, 1902-03.

Document-Based Questions: *Arriving at Ellis Island*

Although he was a British citizen, writer **Stephen Graham** lived in Russia and wrote in Russian. He wrote ***With Poor Immigrants to America*** after arriving at Ellis Island with a shipload of Russian immigrants. (English translation by Macmillan Company, New York, 1914)

The day of the *emigrants*' arrival in New York was the nearest earthly likeness to the final Day of Judgment, when we have to prove our fitness to enter heaven... It was the hardest day since leaving Europe and home. From 5 A.M., when we had breakfast, to three in the afternoon, when we landed at the Battery, we were driven in herds from one place to another, ranged into single files, passed in review before doctors, poked in the eyes by eye-inspectors, cross-questioned by the pocket-inspectors [and] vice detectives...



Arriving at Ellis Island. Photo: National Park Service (NPS).

Nobody had slept the night before. Those who approached America for the first time stood on the open deck and stared at the lights of Long Island. Others packed trunks...

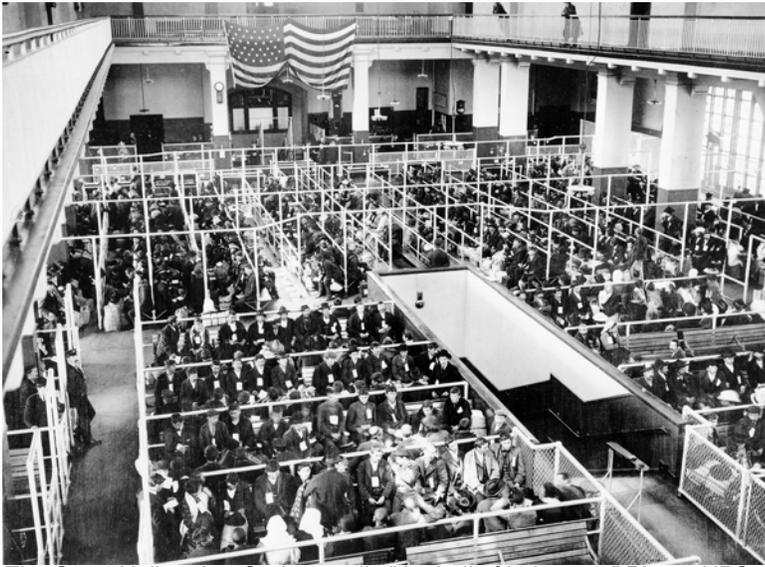
At seven o'clock, our boat lifted anchor and we glided up the still waters of the harbor. The whole prow [deck] was a black mass of passengers staring at the ferry-boats, the distant factories, and sky-scrapers... the green-grey statue of Liberty [was] far way and diminutive [small] at first, but later on, a celestial [heavenly] figure in a blaze of sunlight...



Waiting in line, again. Photo: NPS.

At 8:30, we were quick-marched out of the ship to the Customs Wharf and there ranged in six or seven long lines. All the officials were running and hustling, shouting out, "Come on!" "Hurry!" "Move along!" and clapping their hands. Our trunks were examined... and then we were quick-marched further to a waiting ferry-boat... All were thinking "Have I enough money?" "Shall I pass the doctor?"

At quarter-past twelve... We slowly filed up to a doctor who turned our eyelids inside out with a metal instrument. Another doctor scanned faces and hands for skin diseases... We passed into the vast hall of judgment and were... put into lines again, this time according to our nationality. It was interesting to observe [see]... the mechanical obsession



The Great Hall—what Graham calls “the hall of judgment.” Photo: NPS.

of the American People... It is not good to be like a hurrying, bumping, wandering piece of coal being mechanically guided to the sacks of its type and use, but such is the lot of the immigrant at Ellis Island.

The hall of judgment was crowned by two immense American flags. The centre, and indeed the great body of the hall, was filled with immigrants in their stalls... Up above was a visitors’ gallery where journalists and the curious might... talk about the melting-pot, and America...

Among the clerk’s offices, were exits; one gate led to Freedom and New York, another to *quarantine*, a third to the railway ferry, a fourth to the... place where unsuitable emigrants are imprisoned until there is a ship to take them back to their native lands.

At half-past two, I gave particulars [details] of myself and showed the coin I had, and was passed. “Have you ever been arrested?” asked the inspector... Well, yes, I had. I had been arrested four or five times. In Russia you can’t escape that. . . “Are you willing to live in subordination to [follow] the laws of the United States?” “Yes.”

At three in the afternoon I stood in another ferry-boat and with a crowd of approved immigrants [arrived in] the City of New York. . . That is what it feels like to pass the Last Day and still believe in Heaven, to pass Ellis Island and still believe in America.



Lining up for the ferry to leave Ellis Island. Photo: NPS.

What did the immigration officials at Ellis Island want to know about the new arrivals before they allowed them to enter America (name three different things)? Do you think this is fair?

Why does Graham compare his experience at Ellis Island to a lump of coal falling through chutes and into a sack?



Post-Visit Extension: Original Historical Research by Students

To Be Somebody in America introduces students to the lives of real immigrants. The NPNH Education Center would like to know more about these people—for example, to have copies of original documents or photographs of each immigrant—but that requires further research. We invite your students to engage in original research and to share it with us.

Examining original documents will give students a more complete image of the lives of these immigrants. Some original documents are available via online search engines. Other materials are available at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) – New York office.

1. **Online research** can be done from a computer, but requires time and patience. *Passenger ship manifests*, which list alien passengers debarking ships prior to 1924, can be found by using various search engines.

2. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) – New York has original documents which give students a glimpse into the way newly-landed immigrants lived in America. NARA has passenger ship manifests from 1820-1957, including passenger airplane manifests. The National Archives also has Federal Census Records (1790-1930) and naturalization (citizenship) records for persons officially naturalized in New York state.

Online Research: Passenger Ship Manifests

Passenger ship manifests are the lists of alien passengers who arrived in the New York area. These records list the name, age and original home of the immigrant, their nearest contact from their country of origin and how much money they brought to the U.S. Often this information enriches our understanding of an oral history.

Select Passenger Arrival Records are also available via privately-run online search catalogs. Search engines such as **EllisIsland.org**, **stevemorse.org** and **Italiangen.org** are run by foundations or volunteers, not by the National Park Service. They may charge a fee for printing the documents you find. Search engines may not always be user-friendly and may have frequent technical problems. *Give students the time* to try several options.

Before starting online research, gather as many details as possible.

- Name of immigrant (**NOTE: Use the person's original name, as sometimes the name is changed during the naturalization process. See examples below.**)
- Names of parents, especially if the immigrant arrives in the U.S. as a child
- Country of origin (even town and region, if possible)
- Date of birth
- Year of arrival in the U.S.
- Ship of arrival and the port of embarkation

Written on the manifest is this note: “*Defective vision Without Gl RE 20/100 With Gl 20/20.*” That means Ellis Island officials tested her eyesight. Without her glasses, her vision was 20/100 vision—not good. With glasses, it was 20/20—perfect. Bertha could enter the U.S. after all. For more helpful tips on reading ship manifests, see www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/Manifests/

Further Online Research

Student may find out more about their immigrants through Internet search engines such as Google. Louis Winnick, for example, authored several sociological texts. Barbara Barondess wrote an autobiography, which goes into greater detail about her escape from Europe.

NOTE: Some of these texts might contain material that is not suitable for all young readers.

Some Google searches may reveal that your immigrant is still alive. We recommend respecting the privacy of the individual and not contacting them.

Digging Deeper: Census and Naturalization Records at the National Archives

Ship manifests are like snapshots. They capture an immigrant’s life during the journey to Ellis Island. Other records reveal the immigrant’s life *after* arrival. Both *Federal Census* and *Naturalization* records have such information. To see such records for residents of New York and New Jersey, one must visit the National Archives – New York in lower Manhattan.

National Archives and Records Administration
201 Varick Street, 12th Floor
New York, New York 10014
(enter on Houston, between Varick and Hudson)

Phone: (866) 840-1752; (212) 401-1620
Email: newyork.archives@nara.gov
Web: www.archives.gov/northeast/nyc/

Federal Census Records are available for the years 1790 – 1930 and are searchable via microfilm, not via computer. The Federal Census is taken every 10 years and are made available to the general public after 72 years. That means the 1930 Census is the latest one available. In addition to place of residence, census records include family names, ages, occupations, country of nativity and more. The 1930 and 1920 census also list if a person was naturalized. Locating a person on a Census record is the easiest way to begin finding other related materials.

Naturalization records, where an immigrant applies for citizenship, also contain a great deal of personal data. The National Archives has records for persons naturalized in Federal Courts between the years 1792-1991. These records include an immigrant’s address, occupation, marriage status and the names and ages of children. They tend to be more accurate than ship manifests. Sometimes these records even include the person’s photograph.

To view these records, contact the National Archives – New York. Although requests may be made remotely, researchers are encouraged to visit in person. *Chaperoned students* may conduct original research. In order to use original records, NARA *strongly* urges that researchers of all ages contact them prior to visiting. *Doing preliminary research before visiting NARA will make your on-site research much easier.*

NOTE: NARA–New York maintains records for persons naturalized in *New York and New Jersey only*. Records for immigrants who lived elsewhere (like Paul Frkovich, who lived in St. Louis) are *not* stored at NARA — New York, but at other NARA offices nationwide.

Before visiting NARA, gather as many details as possible.

- Name and date of birth of immigrant
- Place of residence: *Manhattan* residents used the U.S. Southern District Court; residents of *Brooklyn, Queens* and *Staten Island* used the U.S. Eastern District Court. New Jersey has only one U.S. Judicial District, with three court locations.
- For immigrants living in New York City, locate the *file numbers* of naturalization records by searching www.italiengen.org (for New Jersey immigrants, **email NARA first**)
- Names of parents, especially if he or she arrived as a child, and other family members
- Date and place of birth (even town and region, if possible)
- Year of arrival in the US; other arrival information
- Tentative guess of the year the immigrant applied for naturalization

NOTE: When a husband or father gained citizenship, his wife and underage children became citizens automatically. Children born in the U.S.—such as Barbara Barondess, Mary Slobojian Nerstad and Linnea Hallgren—receive citizenship at birth, but the parents may remain aliens.

Records held at NARA – New York

Doukenie (Doukeny) **Bacos**, born December 18, 1904. *U.S. Eastern District Court (Brooklyn), Petition for Naturalization #55302. Certificate of Arrival #20620 (as Doukeni Vavayanne).*

Mary Margaret Gordon, from Ireland, passage on the *Adriatic*, 1927. Born August 1, 1905. *U.S. Southern District Court (Manhattan), Petition for Naturalization #646173.*

Hilda Rattner (mother of Nelly Ratner Myers), from Austria, 1942. *U.S. Southern District Court (Manhattan), Declaration of Intention #530495; Petition for Naturalization #557139.*

Benjamin Brandes (father of Barbara Barondess), from Poland, 1921. *U.S. Eastern District Court (Brooklyn), petition for Naturalization #82993. For his wife Stella, petition #110861.*

Leo Manzone, from Italy, around 1922. *Petition for Naturalization, filed by Leo Manzone, can be found in the U.S. Southern District Court (Manhattan), #191667.*



Post-Visit Extension: Create a Student Oral History Project

Reading an oral history makes history real for students. They “meet” real people who lived through historical events. An even richer experience is for students to conduct their own oral history interviews with a subject—to meet people *literally*. Gathering oral histories also helps students gain both content and skills in a rewarding, provocative manner.

From elementary school to graduate school, students have participated in oral history programs across the U.S. Creating a student oral history program, however, demands a serious commitment from teachers and students alike. Luckily, educators can draw from over thirty years of experience to design a program that best fits your students’ needs and interests.

An excellent source is *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians: An Anthology of Oral History Education* by Barry A. Lanman and Laura M. Wendling (2005). Teachers give advice on how to organize the project, what language can help teachers to gain administrative support for the project and how to assess student work.

In his essay “The Oral History Experience,” Lanman outlines six important steps in planning what he calls an “oral history experience” for students:

- Developing *process* goals and standards (what steps students need to take)
- Developing *product* goals and standards (what students produce at the end)
- Curricular assessment (what standards the project will cover)
- Resource assessment (where students can go for interviews)
- Training and experience (what do they—and you—need to know beforehand)
- Developing a student evaluation (how to rate student work)

Oral histories require trust between the subject and the interviewer. The Oral History Association has adopted a list of principles and standards, including “respect to interviewers” and “respect to the public and the profession.” While eighth graders may not be held to the same rigor as graduate students, the basic responsibilities to the subject are the same: respect, courtesy and accuracy. For example, if the school intends to place the interview on the Internet or in a publication, the subject must sign a consent form prior to the interview that makes this explicit.



New York State Core Curriculum, Grade 8

From **Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum**, 1999

Unit III, *Industrialization of the United States*

- Immigration, 1850-1924: Impulses abroad, attractions here, “Americanization” process
- Reactions to “new” immigration: Diversity vs. nativism, impact on African-Americans, Literacy testing, the Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924.

Unit V, *At Home and Abroad: Prosperity and Depression*: World War I, Prosperity, Depression

Unit VI, *U.S. in an Age of Global Crisis*: Nazi Holocaust and U.S. reaction, Cold War, loss of China

Unit VII, *World in Uncertain Times*: New immigration patterns

From **English Language Arts Core Curriculum**, May 2005

READING, Grade-specific performance indicators

Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:

- Apply thinking skills...to interpret data, facts...
- Compare and contrast information from a variety of different sources.
- Condense, combine or categorize new information from one or more sources.
- Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information.
- Make, confirm or revise predictions.

Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*: Identify social, cultural contexts ... to understand...

Standard 3, *Critical Analysis & Evaluation*: Evaluate the validity and accuracy of information.

Standard 4, *Social Interaction*: Consider the age, gender... and cultural traditions of the writer.

LISTENING, Grade-specific performance indicators

Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:

- Recall significant ideas and details...
- Recognize that the speaker’s voice and delivery impact communication.

Standard 4, *Social Interaction*:

- Respect the age, gender, social position, and cultural traditions of the speaker.
- Listen for more than one level of meaning, articulated and unspoken.

WRITING, Grade-specific performance indicators

Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*:

- Take research notes...
- Use ... graphic organizers...
- Include relevant and exclude irrelevant information.
- Use paraphrase and quotation correctly.

Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*: Write original literary texts to...sequence events to advance a plot; use action, conflict, climax, falling action and resolution.

SPEAKING, Grade-specific performance indicators

Standard 1, *Information & Understanding*: Contribute to group discussions.

Standard 2, *Literary Response & Expression*: Present original literary texts...

Standard 3, *Critical Analysis & Evaluation*: Express opinions and judgments about information...



For Further Research

Literacy-Based Learning: Books Students Can Read

NOTE: *Sections of these books may not be appropriate for all readers.*

- *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Chronicle of Ellis Island* by Edward Corsi, 1935. Ellis Island's former U.S. Commissioner was himself an Ellis Island immigrant from Italy.
- *On the Trail of the Immigrant* and *The Immigrant Tide* by Edward A. Steiner, 1906 & 1909.
- *One Life is Not Enough* by Barbara Barondess MacLean, 1986. Born in Brooklyn, the citizenship of this stage and screen actress saved her Russian family from the Revolution.
- *Motl the Cantor's Son* by Sholem Aleichem. Delightful short stories about Jewish immigrants, including a vivid description of detention on "Ella's Island."
- *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by Paule Marshall, 1959. A novel about an immigrant from Barbados.

Ellis Island Books for Teachers and Students

- *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words* by Peter Morton Coen, 1997. Many more selections from the Ellis Island Oral History Project, with interviewer questions edited out.
- *America Begins in New York: A Peopling of New York City—A Teachers' Resource Manual on Immigration*. Dozens of primary sources, with extensive teacher tips on how to use them.
- *Ellis Island: Echoes of a Nation's Past*, ed. by Susan Jonas. Large book with historic photos.
- *Ellis Island: An Illustrated History of the Immigrant Experience*, ed. by Fred Wasserman, 1991. Similar to the above book, but with more about the post-immigration experience.

Having Students Conduct Their Own Oral Histories

- *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Histories: An Anthology of Oral History Education*, ed. by Barry A. Lanman and Laura M. Wendling, 2006. Includes how-to essays for teachers.
- *To Feel As Our Ancestors Did: Collecting and Performing Oral Histories* by Daniel A. Kelin II, 2005. Students interview their elders and convert them to well-rehearsed performances.
- *Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom* by Barry Lanman & George Mehaffy, 1988.
- *Life Songs: Middle School Students as Oral Historians* by Frances Corvasce (Macko), 1993.

Web Sites

<http://www.nps.gov/stli> National Park Service website for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

<http://learning.turner.com/efts/ellis/> Commercial website. More oral histories, primary sources.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/> Textbook company uses oral histories to give students a "tour" through the process of immigration at Ellis Island.

http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html
Library of Congress "American Memory" website. On-line exhibits; images, maps, documents.

<http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/> Immigration statistics by year.

<http://www.archives.gov/northeast/nyc/> National Archives – New York website.