

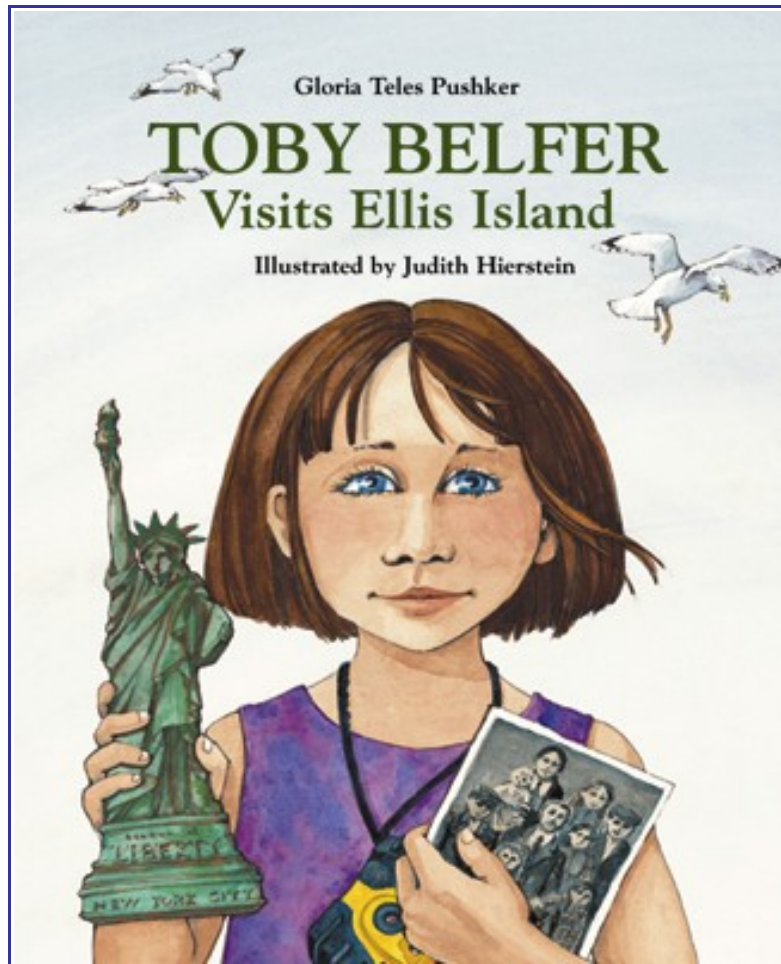


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Classroom Activity Guide for *Toby Belfer Visits Ellis Island*

Written by Gloria Pushker
Illustrated by Judith Hierstein



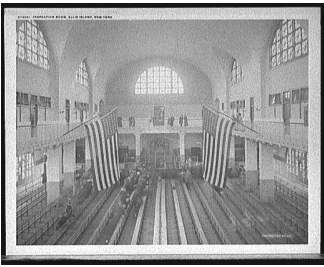
This study guide includes
Historical background on Ellis Island
The immigrant experience
Trivia
Web sites to research
Writing exercises
Journaling



Worksheets are fully reproducible

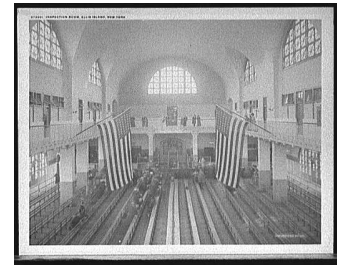


Created by Pamela Albers



Inspection Room at Ellis Island

Getting to America was only half the battle. . .



Inspection Room at Ellis Island

With Europe behind them, the many immigrants waiting onboard the steamers that brought them to a new land of opportunity and freedom still were not quite “free.”

As the steamers set down anchor in America, welcoming the new immigrants was a barrage of tests and processing to go through before they would be officially “free” to make their new home in America.

The first and second class passengers were processed onboard the ship – class had its privileges even in America. Then they were moved through customs and were free to go on to start their new lives. They did not have to endure the processing on Ellis Island.

For the poor, it was not so easy. The steerage (or third class) passengers were penned up on the piers, cold, hungry, waiting to be told where to go and what to do; most were poor and many were sick. Women traveling alone were particularly susceptible to con men and trickery; many lost their belongings while waiting on the docks. They were then loaded onto barges and ferries for a trip to Ellis Island.

Medical Processing

As they disembarked, they were told to collect their belongings in the baggage room and then to report to the Great Hall. As the immigrants moved through the Great Hall, doctors watched men, women, children and the sick struggling with packages and belongings to see if they limped, had trouble seeing, coughed too much, gasped for breath, or scratched with lice.

If a doctor spotted someone they suspected was ill, they would use blue chalk to mark letters on the back of each immigrant. (See chart on right).

Then the immigrant was taken aside for closer examination; the most dreaded of all experiences was the medical exam. Imagine being on the doorstep of America only to be put back on the same ship to go back to the land they had just fled. In 1882 “idiots,” insane persons, paupers, persons likely to become “public charges,” convicted felons, or those suffering from contagious diseases were not admitted. In time, this list came to include anarchists, orphaned children under 16, and those with tuberculosis.

After successfully making it through medical processing, they moved on to mental processing.

X	Suspected mental defect
(X)	Definite signs of Mental Disease
B	Black
C	Conjunctivitis
CT	Trachoma
E	Eyes
F	Face
FT	Feet
G	Goiter
H	Heart
K	Hernia
N	Neck
L	Lameness
P	Physical and Lungs
PG	Pregnancy
Sc	Scalp (Fungus)
S	Senility

Mental processing

The next step for all incoming immigrants was mental testing. People had to undergo a screening test to determine if they had sufficient mental capacity to enter the U.S. Approximately 9 out of every 100 immigrants were marked with an “X”, meaning that they had to go through even closer scrutiny. Out of these 9, one or two would be held over for yet more screening.



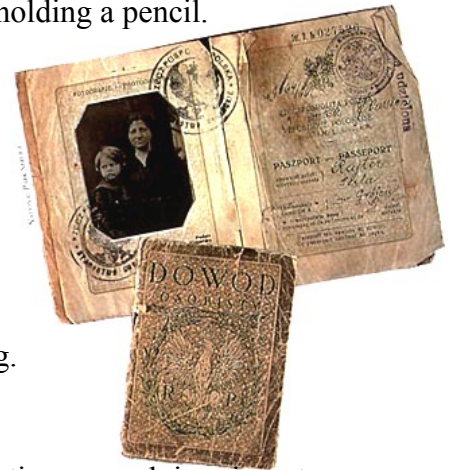
An infirmary on Ellis Island

Such mental capacity tests included counting backward from 20 to 1, adding two plus two, and answering questions to test thinking skills. When one young woman was asked how she would wash stairs, she replied, “I don’t go to America to wash stairs.”

Other tests included putting puzzles together, putting wooden pegs in the proper holes in a pegboard, and copying geometric shapes to see who was accustomed to holding a pencil.

Legal Processing

The next step for the immigrants was going before the inspector’s desk in the Registry Room for his/her legal exam. This exam was to determine the social, economic, and moral fitness of the immigrant. Inspectors asked such questions as: Are you married or single?, What is your occupation?, Have you ever been convicted of a crime?, and How much money do you have? In a matter of minutes an immigrant was either approved for entry into the U.S. or detained for a legal hearing.



Changing Names on Ellis Island

Using the manifest sheets as a guide, inspectors would verify the information on each immigrant. The manifest sheets were hand-written and it was the duty of each inspector to make sure that the information was complete and accurate. Scores of immigrants claim that their names were simplified (changed or shortened) as they stood before the inspector’s desk. Although the changes have not been verified, those changes are a part of the oral tradition of the events on Ellis Island.

Literacy Tests

Many were opposed to all of the immigrants being allowed to enter the United States. Those opposed found means of restricting immigrants by imposing literacy tests. The Immigration Act of 1917 required that all immigrants 16 years of age or older to read a 40-word passage in their native language. These dual-language cards were used by inspectors to test immigrant literacy

Liable to Become a Public Charge

Beginning in 1882, those who had no obvious means of support and therefore had a greater potential of becoming a public charge and a burden on society, were denied entry into the United States. Immigrants had to show their money and prove that they were not paupers. In 1909 the Commissioner of Immigration, William Williams, directed that all immigrants must have railroad tickets to their destination and \$25 in cash. His direction was later rescinded due to pressure from immigrant aid societies.



Dorm room in the detention center

Detention

People were detained for many reasons, and during the peak years of immigration detention rates hit 20%. Immigrants were detained for a few days to weeks. Some waited for a relative to be released from the Ellis Island hospital, some waited for money, and still others waited for the relatives to come for them. It was a lonely time for those who waited, cut off from friends and family in a strange land with little to do but wait.

Women and children were detained for their own safety. A letter, telegram or prepaid ticket from waiting relatives was usually required for women and children to leave the island. If a fiancé and his intended were reunited on the island, the marriage was often performed before they were allowed to leave.

Finally – on the road to their destinations

After completing the many stops along their road to freedom, immigrants were free to travel to their final destination. Immigrants gathered their belongings, exchanged their money for American currency, and then boarded ferries to New York and were reunited with loving family and friends. Only about one third of immigrants stayed in New York, others scattered to points all across the country

(International Channel Web site: www.internationalchannel.com/education/ellis).



Immigrants who had been cleared to leave Ellis Island waited in line to exchange their money for American currency.

Class exercises:

Have the students pretend to pack a bag with necessary items for their trip to the United States. Discuss the items that it would have been necessary to carry in order to live for 25-30 days on a steamer ship and to start life in a new country. What items would have been essential and what items would have to be left behind?

After reading over the immigrant processing material, have the students reenact the immigration process on Ellis Island. Assign the roles of immigrants, doctor, inspector, etc. Remind the students that many did not accept these new groups of people and their prejudice would cause unfair treatment.

Have the students write an essay about the immigration process from an immigrant's point of view.

Students could interview a family member or friend who has immigrated to the United States. Below is a list of questions to help in their research:

- What was the primary reason you immigrated to this country?
- When did you come to the United States?
- Where was your home before you moved to the United States?
- What did you do in your homeland before you moved here?
- Where did you first settle when you came to this country?
- Did you know English when you came here? What other languages did you speak?
- What was the trip to the United States like? Did you come over land, by boat, by plane, etc? Was the trip hard or easy? Were you ever worried or frightened?
- What were your first impressions about the United States? Did your first experiences live up to what you had hoped for?
- Did you experience any racism or prejudice when you moved to this country?

To learn more about the immigrant experience visit these Web sites:

www.internationalchannel.com/education/ellis

www.historychannel.com/exhibits/ellisisle

www.ellisland.com/indexhistory

www.scholasticbooks/ellisland



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Trivia Time

America has been blessed with a wealth of actors, writers, musicians, filmmakers and scientists – many of whom were immigrants to this country.

These questions are a little hard - you may want to ask your teacher or do research on the Internet.

1. This person came to America in 1921; he was from Hungary and went on to become a famous movie actor who starred in many movies such as the 1930 film, “Little Caesar”, and the 1948 film, “All My Sons?” _____
2. This famous, singing family was the subject of a popular movie starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer. What is the name of the family and where did they come from? _____
3. This very famous comedian celebrated his 100th birthday in May of 2003. He has traveled the world over entertaining military troops and every president since Teddy Roosevelt has honored him. What is his name? _____. From what country did he immigrate? _____.
4. This person is a famous science-fiction writer know for such books as *I, Robot* and *Robot Dreams*. What is his name and where did he come from? _____.
5. This very handsome leading man made his mark in silent movies such as “The Sheik” in 1921, but had to stop making them when movies started having sound because his accent was so heavy that nobody could understand him. Who is this Hollywood star? _____. What country is he from? _____.
6. In addition to releasing a string of successful records between 1912 to 1949, this person achieved pre-eminent stardom on Broadway, hosted several radio series, and became the first important figure of the sound era of motion pictures. Who was this person? What country did he immigrate from? _____

There are many more immigrant celebrities. To find a list of them go to

www.historychannel.com/exhibits/ellisisle/fame.

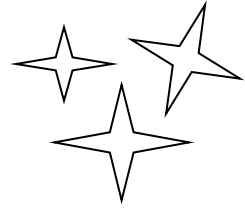
Answers to Trivia

1. Edward G. Robinson; 2. Von Trapp Family, Austria; 3. Bob Hope, England; 4. Isaac Asimov, Russia; 5. Rudolph Valentino, Italy; 6. Al Jolson, Lithuania

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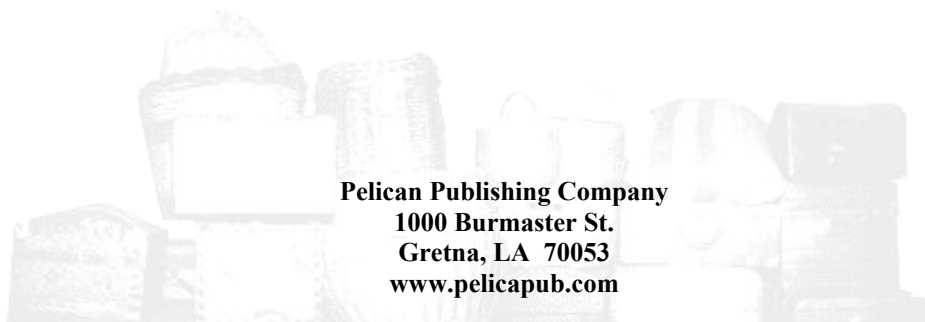
A Journey Begins With a Single Step



Imagine how difficult it must have been for some people to decide to leave their homeland and set off to an entirely different country where nobody spoke their language, the food was unfamiliar, and they had no jobs. What kinds of decisions do you think the immigrants had to make before they could make the trip to America?

In the space below list the decisions that you would have to make if you were going to make such a trip. How do you think this compares to the decisions that the immigrants had to make?

Pretend that you are giving advice to an immigrant who is coming to America today. What advice would you give?





Crossing the Ocean



Most immigrants came to America as “third class” passengers in the steerage section of the large steamer ships. This section was called steerage because it was located next to the steering mechanisms of the ship. Dark, stuffy, and often damp the living conditions were very harsh and made even healthy people quite ill.

To see a description of the steerage accommodations of many of these large ships visit the Web site for Balch Institute. www.balchinstitute.org/resources/emigration.usa.

Using this Web site do the following exercises:

Pick three steamships from the *White Star Line* and read about the steerage accommodations. Compare and contrast these conditions to the first class accommodations.

Find the ship manifests on the Web site. Write down the number of steerage passengers and the number of other passengers for one steam ship. Using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel or Appleworks, make a pie chart to show the percentage of passengers who traveled in each class. What did you discover?

Look at the ship manifest for S/S Vega 1891, for the Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild. And then answer these questions.

What was the average age of immigrants on this ship?

What percentage of the passengers were children? (you can use both boys and girls)

What was the most common occupation for women? For men?

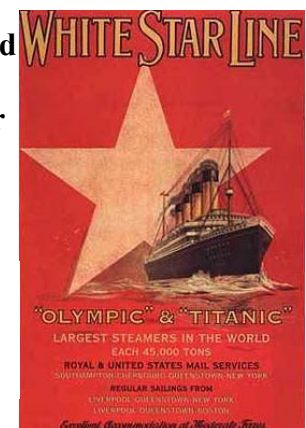
What country had the largest number of emigrants?

Writing Exercises

Pretend you are a child on board one of the immigrant ships travelling in the steerage accommodations - write down what your experiences might have been. How might your experience have been different if you were a child travelling first or second class?

Write a letter to your family back home explaining your life on board the steamer ship. Describe what you have seen and what you have experienced so that someone who has never been on board a steamer ship can understand it.

*A poster advertising the White Star Line
Of passenger ships taking immigrants to America*



Toby's Word Search

G Y R A M R I F N I Y C C D
F R M O N E Y Y T M T G O N
A S A R E H T O R B R R U A
T I C N C L B R T B E A N L
H L E O D Y W V O V B N T S
E L I G U M O N R P I D R I
R E E H A R O S E T L F Y M
I M M I G R A T I O N A E A
F O O D L M E G H R S T S K
F R E E D O M E E E I H B E
P M A R A T S F T H R E O R
O N W F N N L Y W S L R J H
S M O T H E R E T S I S Q A
F J U A B A W J W W M B V T

BELFER
BROTHER
COUNTRY
COURAGE
ELLIS
FATHER
FOOD
FREEDOM
GRANDFATHER
GRANDMOTHER
HAT
IMMIGRATION
INFIRMARY

ISLAND
JOBS
LIBERTY
MAKER
MONEY
MOTHER
NEW
ORLEANS
PORT
SISTER
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STEERAGE
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TOBY BELFER VISITS ELLIS ISLAND

By Gloria Teles Pushker
Illustrated by Judith Hierstein

"It's a history that ought not be overlooked or forgotten."
Star

--Chicago Jewish

"If you aren't familiar with Toby Belfer, you are missing something. Children five to eight will find Toby a charming young lady to read about and, in this particular book, should be stimulated to ask about the origins of their own family."
Journal

--Youngstown (Ohio) Jewish

Toby Belfer's great-grandmother's family lived happily in a small town in Poland. When a group of soldiers came into the town and threatened its inhabitants, the family decided to leave. It was hard coming to America in 1904. All of the passengers, including people from all over Europe, were nervous about learning English and adapting to the new laws and customs. As they arrived, all the immigrants had to form lines and answer question after question before they could see a doctor and be on their way.

As Toby's grandmother tells her this story about their family's history, Toby gets especially excited about visiting Ellis Island on her upcoming vacation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Gloria Teles Pushker grew up in New Orleans and was one of the few Jewish girls in the neighborhood. After earning her master's degree in education with a concentration in children's literature, she decided to share her experiences with the world through Toby Belfer. Other titles in the series include *Toby Belfer Never Had a Christmas Tree* (\$15.95), *Toby Belfer's Seder: A Passover Story Retold* (\$15.95), *Toby Belfer and the High Holy Days* (\$15.95), and *A Belfer Bar Mitzvah* (\$15.95).

Judith Hierstein couples the words with images, bringing Toby's world to life. After earning a B.A. in art from the University of Iowa, Hierstein realized that illustrating was a great way to encourage children to learn about other cultures. Ms. Hierstein resides in Waterloo, Iowa.

TOBY BELFER VISITS ELLIS ISLAND

By Gloria Teles Pushker
Illustrated by Judith Hierstein
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