

# Ellis Island

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A reader's theater with five parts

**Reader 1:** America is made up of people who originally came from all over the world.

**Reader 4:** When people move to America from other countries, it is called immigrating.

**Reader 3:** The people that immigrate are called immigrants.

**Reader 2:** So, immigrants are people who have moved to the United States from another country.

**Reader 1:** Just about every person in the U.S. has ancestors who immigrated from another country.

**Reader 4:** It's fun to look back in history and see where your ancestors came from.

**Reader 5:** How do you look back in history and find that information?

**Reader 3:** You have to do some research, maybe search the Internet or go to the library.

**Reader 2:** You can also talk to your parents,

**Reader 5:** Or your grandparents,

**Reader 1:** Or look through old family pictures and journals.

## Ellis Island *(cont.)*

**Reader 4:** Sometimes people wrote important facts about their lives, such as marriages, births, and deaths in the family bible.

**Reader 3:** You can also research the records from Ellis Island.

**Reader 5:** Ellis Island?

**Reader 1:** Where is that?

**Reader 3:** Ellis Island was an immigration center, where many people who moved to America went when they first arrived.

**Reader 2:** Before the center was built, Ellis Island was a small piece of land located in the New York Harbor.

**Reader 4:** Then, in 1892, the U.S. Government decided to build this center and call it the Ellis Island Immigration Center.

**Reader 1:** Most people called it Ellis Island for short.

**Reader 5:** Why did the United States need an immigration center?

**Reader 3:** The U.S. Government wanted to keep track of the hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people who arrived in America every day by ship.

**Reader 2:** The government also wanted to examine immigrants to see if each person was healthy and whether he or she would be a good immigrant or not.

**Reader 5:** What do you mean, a good immigrant?

**Reader 1:** Doctors at Ellis Island examined each person to see if he or she had an illness that might spread in the city.

## Ellis Island *(cont.)*

**Reader 3:** If a doctor said an immigrant was too ill . . .

**Reader 5:** or had a contagious disease, than that immigrant had to wait on Ellis Island until he or she got well.

**Reader 1:** That's awful.

**Reader 4:** If they were too sick, sometimes immigrants had to return to the country from which they came.

**Reader 2:** Officials also examined immigrants at Ellis Island to see if they were smart enough to stay in America.

**Reader 5:** If you weren't smart enough, did they make you go back home?

**Reader 3:** Why did they care about that?

**Reader 1:** The government believed that all immigrants should be able to take care of themselves.

**Reader 2:** If you weren't smart enough or if you had a disability, you could be sent back to your home country.

**Reader 4:** Each family also had to show the government that it had enough money to get started in America.

**Reader 5:** What if you came from a country that was very poor and you didn't have any money?

**Reader 3:** You had to hope that you had a family member or friend, already living in the U.S., who would give you money or a loan so you could stay.

## Ellis Island *(cont.)*

**Reader 5:** Did families travel together?

**Reader 1:** Many families had to travel separately.

**Reader 3:** Separately? What do you mean?

**Reader 2:** Many times, only one of the parents would come to America first to make some money.

**Reader 4:** Then, the mom or dad would send money back to the family to help the rest come to the United States.

**Reader 3:** Sometimes it could take many years for a parent to earn enough money for the rest of the family to join him or her.

**Reader 5:** I would be so sad to be apart from my family for so long.

**Reader 1:** Yes, but many people wanted to do whatever it took to come to the new land where there was a better life available.

**Reader 3:** America is the land of opportunity.

**Reader 2:** Ellis Island Immigration Center was just one part of a very difficult journey for immigrants moving to America.

**Reader 5:** It's hard to believe that some of your ancestors and my ancestors might have been immigrants that came through Ellis Island.

**Reader 2:** Yes, the records from Ellis Island show that between 1892 and 1922 at least 12 million people passed through Ellis Island.

**Reader 5:** Twelve million people wanted a new start in America.

# Ellis Island

## Connections

### Literature Connection—*Dreaming of America* by Eve Bunting

*Dreaming of America* is a historical-fiction short story about Annie Moore, the first immigrant to be processed through Ellis Island on January 1, 1892.

### Content Connections—Government, Civics

*Ellis Island* introduces students to the concept of immigration and the process of being admitted into America through Ellis Island at the turn of the nineteenth century.

## Objective

Students will organize information into logical and sequential order as indicated in the script.

## Vocabulary

1. Write the vocabulary words on the board and discuss the definitions.
2. Have students work in groups of two to fill in the sentences below with the vocabulary words. Check as a class.

- **immigration**—the process of moving to America from another country
- **immigrant**—a person who has moved to America from another country
- **ancestors**—relatives that have come before you
- **harbor**—a protected body of water for ships to anchor in that is connected to the ocean
- **contagious**—able to carry or spread disease or germs from one person to another

1. I hope your cold is not \_\_\_ because I don't want to get sick!
2. My grandmother was an \_\_\_ to America from Ireland.
3. My \_\_\_ on my mother's side come from Italy.
4. When my great grandfather entered the \_\_\_ center, he had to prove to the officials that he was able to take care of himself in this country.
5. The new immigrants couldn't wait for their ship to dock safely in the \_\_\_ .

## Before the Reader's Theater

1. Read the title of the script and ask the class to predict what this reader's theater will be about. Is it fiction or nonfiction? Why?

# Ellis Island *(cont.)*

## Before the Reader's Theater *(cont.)*

2. Read the script aloud, modeling appropriate reading strategies. It is important for the students to hear the script read aloud before practicing the parts on their own. This will help them with fluency and comprehension.

## During the Reader's Theater

1. Divide the class into groups of five to read and practice the script.
2. Students work as a group to choose and highlight their parts in the script.
3. Give students a few minutes to practice reading with expression, and to practice any actions (arm movements, walking, etc.) to be used during the performance. In addition, students may choose a few props or materials to use during the performance. These items should be easily acquired or quickly assembled in the classroom.
4. After practicing, each group performs the reader's theater for the class. They may also perform for another class.

## After the Reader's Theater

1. Display the overhead transparency of the *Sequential Order* graphic organizer.
2. Either complete the organizer together as a class using the overhead transparency, or have each student complete his or her own copy of the organizer as a possible assessment piece.

## Response Questions

### Group Discussion Questions

- What do you think it would be like to leave the country where you were born and sail on a ship to another country?
- What do you think it would be like if your parents were not with you on the ship?

### Written Response Question

- What do you think was the most difficult part of immigrating to America in the late 1800s?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Sequential Order

**Directions:** Put the proper number in front of the following events to indicate the logical or sequential order in which the events might happen.

\_\_\_\_\_ The immigration officials checked each person's health.

\_\_\_\_\_ The young man was given permission to live in the United States.

\_\_\_\_\_ The voyage across the ocean on a rough sea was very hard on most of the passengers.

\_\_\_\_\_ The young man was declared healthy and fit.

\_\_\_\_\_ The young man left his country on a ship for America.

\_\_\_\_\_ When the ship reached the harbor, the ride became much smoother.