

Imagine an Immigration Interview

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Read the “Discussion Questions” sheets for ways to talk about the immigration interviews.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children will try an immigration interview from the early 1900s and consider the meanings behind those questions.

WHY

Exploring these questions will help children put themselves in the shoes of immigrants and think more critically about immigration issues.

TIME

- 15–20 minutes, depending extension activities

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades.

GET READY

- Read *Feivel’s Flying Horses* together. *Feivel’s Flying Horses* is a fictional story that describes an immigrant’s first years in America. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/immigration/immigration_reading.pdf).
- Read the [Step Back in Time](#) sheet.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **almshouse:** a house where poor people were allowed to live for free
- **anarchist:** a person who believes that government and laws are not necessary
- **destination:** a place to which a person is going
- **ethnicity:** group of people who share the same customs, religion, origin or other cultural similarity
- **exclusion:** shut out

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/immigration/>.

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- **inspection station:** a place where officials view, examine, and question individuals (in this case, immigrants)
- **officer:** government worker whose job is to enforce a law
- **nationality:** being a member or citizen of a specific nation
- **occupation:** a person's job
- **passage:** (in this activity) payment for traveling
- **polygamist:** someone who is married to more than one person at the same time

YOU NEED

- Discussion Questions sheets (*attached*)
- Interview Questions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheet (*attached*)

Imagine an Immigration Interview

Step Back in Time

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/immigration/>.

With its long history of immigration, almost everyone in America today has an immigration story somewhere in his or her family. From the colonists of the 1700s to immigrants who arrived just yesterday, people have been coming to live in America for longer than America has been its own country!



The journey to America can be hard. Many immigrants also have difficult choices to make as they prepare to leave their old worlds for America—who in your family can make the trip? What will you bring from your old world? Even just traveling to America can be expensive, dangerous, and emotional.

Once they arrive, immigrants face challenges like getting a job, learning English, finding a house, or starting at a new school. It can take a long time for immigrants to feel comfortable in America. On one hand, many immigrants may want to fit in with what they think is ordinary for Americans. On the other hand, many immigrants want to pass on something from their old world, like words in another language or holiday celebrations. The traditions, skills, and ideas that are passed down through these families enrich American culture.

Today, the United States is one of the most diverse countries on earth, with people whose families have come from nearly all world cultures.

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FOR EXPLORING THE ELLIS ISLAND QUESTIONS:

In addition to the two questions on health, Ellis Island had nurses and doctors to check immigrants for sickness.

- How would you feel getting a health check from someone who spoke a different language?
- Do you think it's fair to send sick people back to their home country? Why or why not?

One of the questions asks about how much money the immigrant has.

Tip

One dollar could buy a lot more things in the early 1900s than it can today.

- Do you think it's fair to ask this question, when a lot of immigrants come to America to earn more money?

FOR EXPLORING THE ANGEL ISLAND QUESTIONS:

Many Chinese immigrants had to prove they had family members already in the United States during their interviews. Immigration officers would compare the answers of family members to look for disagreements that might show someone was lying.

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- Compare the answers of two people in your family. Do both people give the same answers for all of the questions? Which answers don't match? What makes those questions harder to match answers?

Tip

For example, ask two people in your family “How many rooms are on the ground floor of your house?” The answers to this question might not match if one person counts the hallway as a room, but another family member doesn't count the hallway as a room.

Some Chinese immigrants were asked the questions more than once, to make sure they always answered the same way.

- Answer these questions once on a separate piece of paper. After a few hours or a few days, try to answer them again. Did you give the same answers both times?

FOR COMPARING THE TWO SETS OF QUESTIONS:

- What questions do you think would be important to ask immigrants coming to America?
- Have you ever been in an interview? How do you think it would make you feel to have to answer these questions?

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The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first national law to slow immigration of a specific ethnicity.

- Do you think it's fair that there were different laws for immigrants from China? Why? What if it was a country other than China?
- Is it ever fair to have different laws for different kinds of people? Based on their ethnicity? Based on their sex? Based on how old they are?

For more activities and information about *Feivel's Flying Horses* and immigration in American history, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/immigration/>.

Imagine an Immigration Interview

Questions for Immigrants Coming Through Angel Island, page 1 of 2

After 1910, immigrants arriving on the West Coast passed through the immigration inspection station at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. When they arrived on ship, they had to answer interview questions. Immigrants from China had to answer more questions than immigrants from other countries because of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The questions used in interviews at Angel Island were not the same for every immigrant. These are only a few examples of questions.

1. Name your neighbors.
2. What is the address of the school in your town?
3. What pieces of furniture are in your living room?
4. What are the marriage and birth dates of your family members?
5. Where are your grandparents buried?
6. How many steps lead up to your house?
7. Of what material is your home built?
8. Is your house number painted or carved on the front of your house?
9. What direction does the front of your house face?
10. Is there a clock in your father's bedroom?
11. What is the floor under your bed made of?
12. How many rooms are on the ground floor of your house?

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Questions for Immigrants Coming Through Angel Island, page 2 of 2

Many interviews were hours long! In one extreme case, an applicant for immigration was asked almost 900 questions.

Some of the questions are changed here to make sense to a modern American. For example, “Of what material is the ancestral hall built?” was changed to “Of what material is your home built?”

Check the [Step Back in Time](#) sheet for more information about immigration in America.

Imagine an Immigration Interview

Questions for Immigrants Coming Through Ellis Island, page 1 of 2

Many people coming from Europe entered America through Ellis Island. While traveling by ship, they had to answer interview questions. Can you answer all of these questions?

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age? How many years and how many months?
3. What is your sex?
4. Are you married?
5. What is your occupation?
6. Can you read?
7. Can you write?
8. What is your nationality?
9. What is your race or people?
10. What was your last residence? (Country and town)
11. Do you have \$50?
12. Are you healthy?
13. Are you crippled? (If yes, for how long?)

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Some of these questions are hard to answer if you're not an immigrant on your way to your new home:

1. What is your final destination?
2. Do you have a ticket to your final destination?
3. Who paid for your passage?
4. Have you ever been to the United States before? (If yes, when and where?)
5. Are you going to join a relative or friend? (If yes, what is the name and complete address of this relative or friend?)
6. Is someone forcing you to come to America?

Some of these questions are hard for kids to answer:

1. Are you a polygamist?
2. Are you an anarchist?
3. Where you ever in prison, an almshouse, or an institution for the care of the insane?

Check the [Step Back in Time](#) sheet for more information about immigration in America.

Imagine an Immigration Interview

For Teachers

OBJECTIVES

Students will be better able to:

- Describe immigration interviews from the past.
- Evaluate the fairness of immigration procedures from the past.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Evaluation is logically supported.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Content Standards

5A: Demonstrate understanding of the movements of large groups of people into his or her own and other states in the United States now and long ago.

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

4B: Obtain historical data.

4C: Interrogate historical data.

5-12 Historical Thinking Standards

4B: Obtain historical data.

4C: Interrogate historical data.

5-12 U.S. History Standards

Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870–1900)

2A: The student understands the sources and experiences of the new immigrants.

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving