

**Lesson overview**

Subject: US History II

Grade: 7

Topic: Immigration; *The New Colossus*

Concepts: Using literature to examine historical events.

Essential questions:

- What message does *The New Colossus* convey to would-be immigrants?
- What significance does Lazarus' choice of language have in this poem?
- Why was Emma Lazarus a historical choice to write this poem?
- What does this poem indicate about changes in American culture? (considering what we already know about previous time periods)

**Objectives**

✓ Students will know:

1. *The New Colossus* was written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus.
2. This poem is best known because it is engraved on the Statue of Liberty.
3. *The New Colossus* was a message from the American people to the outside world.
4. The US considered itself a "country of immigrants" in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Some Americans were actually welcoming to immigrants, but most were prejudiced against them.

**Vocabulary:**

Huddled

Yearn

Wretched

Refuse (n.)

Teeming

Tempest

**Background Knowledge:**

- a. Women's rights were not established in 1883, specifically the federally mandated right to vote.
- b. The US had a long history of immigration before 1883, but the late 19<sup>th</sup> century brought new waves from China, Eastern Europe and Italy.
- c. Most immigrant families remained poor after arriving in the US. Many immigrants lived in tenement houses, and worked in sweatshops or factories.

✓ Students will understand:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Cultural values are often expressed through literature, though not always accurately.</li><li>2. Complex or “loaded” language carries greater significance than simple language.</li></ol> |
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✓ Students will be able to do:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Summarize the meaning of the selected text from <i>The New Colossus</i>.</li><li>2. Describe the conditions of immigrants at this time.</li><li>3. Compare and contrast the reality of life during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the image of 19<sup>th</sup> century life presented by Emma Lazarus.</li></ol> |
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## Procedures

1. Entry Activity
2. Introduction
3. Reading/Decoding Activity
4. Application Activities
5. Closure/Exit Activity

### Entry Activity (Think/Pair/Share Whip-Around)

The purpose of this is to activate students' prior knowledge. In order to put late 19<sup>th</sup> century culture in the context of a poem, students must recall what they already know about life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Students will work with their partner to answer the following questions. After they have had time to discuss, they will be required to provide answers in a whip-around. Every group must provide at least one unique answer.

#### *Directions:*

*Work with your partner to discuss the following questions. Every group must share at least one of their answers. You cannot repeat answers, so come up with as many ideas as possible, and write them down so you do not forget. **You may use your notes or textbook.***

1. *What were some of the characteristics of life for women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? How was life different in the Midwest region?*
2. *What were some characteristics of immigrant life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Consider where immigrants were coming from, where they chose to live, and the types of jobs they worked.*

## Introduction

We will be using an excerpt from *The New Colossus* in order to frame life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This poem was written by Emma Lazarus in 1883, and it is famous because it appears on the Statue of Liberty. First, we will read the poem, and decode some of its language. Then, we will have three application activities to choose from.

*Distribute materials to students.*

### **Reading Activity Materials**

1. Handouts with the selected excerpt from *The New Colossus*, and the selected vocabulary terms on the back.

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

*Huddled*

*Yearn*

*Wretched*

*Refuse (n.)*

*Teeming*

*Tempest*

2. Dictionaries  
3. Highlighters

### **Reading Activity (Alternative Differentiation through Readiness/Group Preference)**

Students may categorize themselves as **solo**, **partner**, or **group** for this activity. All three categories will be doing the same activity.

**Solo** readers will work in the Independent Study Section of the classroom. They will read the poem once. Then, they will use their highlighters to find the vocabulary words below the excerpt, and dictionaries to find the definitions of the words. They will re-read the poem, with the definitions to help them decode the meaning. After, they must brainstorm ideas as to why Lazarus chose loaded terms, as opposed to simple language. *This group will be most appealing to independent workers, and highly ready students. These students will not have the benefit of peers to help them decode and infer meaning until the debrief.*

**Partners** will complete the same task, in groups of no more than three.

**Group** will be comprised of anyone who wishes to complete this activity with more than three people.

*As instructor, I would encourage students of various readiness levels to work in partnerships and the large group. The benefit of peer work groups only translates when there is a heterogeneous mixture of readiness levels.*

After students have completed the assigned task, we will reconvene as a large group and discuss our impressions of the poem before and after we decoded the language, and speculate as to why Lazarus chose the language she did. This will give all students (especially those who worked by themselves) to express their thoughts on the material.

**Application Activity: Newspaper Reporter (creative intelligence)**

When Emma Lazarus wrote her poem in 1883, it became famous immediately. Take the perspective of a newspaper reporter in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and write an article informing your readers about the historical poem.

You must:

1. Summarize the meaning of the poem.
2. Describe what Lazarus' perspective on culture and life in 1883 was.
3. Compare and contrast life in 1883 with Lazarus' interpretation.
4. Describe life for women in 1883, and why Lazarus was a historical choice to write this poem.
5. Make a prediction about how this poem will influence the future of immigration in America.

Remember: You are taking the perspective of a newspaper reporter in 1883. Do not use your 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge. Use your notes, textbooks and handouts to research the topic before you write. Accuracy is important!

*Rationale: I chose this activity as an example of creative intelligence because it gives students the opportunity to step into the shoes of an imaginary historical figure. Rather than analyzing history in hindsight, these students will attempt to recreate a journalistic response to Lazarus' poem as accurately as possible. I stressed the accuracy of the product in the directions because I want students to keep their grounding in the historical context, and not get too carried away with the creative writing aspect of the assignment.*

**Application Activity: Message to an Immigrant (practical intelligence)**

Students will record a podcast which will be sent to someone in the process of immigrating to the US. In this podcast, you will be acting as an ambassador of American culture to a future American. You will use the selected excerpt from *The New Colossus* to explain the tradition of immigration in the US.

You must:

1. Recite the excerpt
2. Summarize its meaning, in your own words
3. Compare and contrast Lazarus' view of immigration with 19<sup>th</sup> century American society's.
4. Explain the significance of Emma Lazarus, a woman being the author of this poem. What does that say about changes in American culture over time?
5. Describe what makes modern America a nation of immigrants.

*Rationale: This activity is practical because it connects the historical concepts with contemporary American immigration. The purpose of the activity is as concrete as possible, and rooted in an issue of modern relevance. Students are not asked to step back in time, but rather to use the source for a plausible, contemporary purpose.*

**Application Activity: Interview with the Historian (analytical intelligence)**

*The New Colossus* has been the subject of much academic analysis. Take the position of a history professor who is doing a PBS interview about Emma Lazarus, and immigration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Take fifteen minutes to read the list of questions below, and begin drafting a response. After you have completed this task, work with a partner from your activity group, and take turns asking each other questions from the list.

Remember, you are a modern historian discussing the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Emma Lazarus' influence on American cultural values.

**Interview Questions:**

1. What is the meaning of the excerpt from *The New Colossus*?
2. What message was Emma Lazarus giving about American cultural values in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
3. How did Lazarus perspective compare with mainstream American society?
4. What was life like for women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
5. What was the significance of a woman authoring this poem?
6. Why did Emma Lazarus choose the language she did?
7. How was life before 1883 different than life after 1883?

*Rationale: I chose this for my analytical activity because it asks students to consider the influence of the poem in the context of ever-changing cultural values. It requires students to be aware of the dynamic nature of history, and the influence that a single piece of writing can have. This activity asks students to take the position of a historian. Unlike the other two activities, this calls for the most objectivity on the part of the student, and the best awareness of timelines and cause and effect relationships.*

**Conclusion**

Before students can leave they must each fill out an exit slip with the following questions:

1. Summarize the chosen excerpt from *The New Colossus*.
2. Was Lazarus' description of the American attitude toward immigrants accurate? Why or why not?
3. What was the significance of a woman writing this poem?
4. Why did Lazarus choose to use complex language, instead of simple language?