

Lesson Plan 2:

Writing a Play about Immigrant Life in America around 1910

Grades

6-8, 9-12, College 100 level

Description

Students view program segments involving immigration to the U.S. and then discuss why immigrants came to America, what happened to immigrants in America, the settlement house movement, Hull House Maps and Papers, and also the Israel Zangwill hit play, *The Melting Pot*. Groups of students write short one-act plays that incorporate Zangwill's famous speech shown in the film about "America is God's Crucible—God is making the American." Each student has a role in the play. Research for the play must include some facts from the period which are integrated into the play, such as the origin of the immigrants and the challenges that immigrants faced. The play must surround the Zangwill speech with a context that makes sense.

Learning Objectives

By fully participating in this lesson, students will be able to:

- (1) write a script for a short play;
- (2) explain the causes of immigration to the U.S. from 1880-1924;
- (3) describe the circumstances in which immigrants found themselves;
- (4) list ways in which the settlement house movement helped immigrants; and
- (5) understand that old conflicts can be unimportant in new circumstances.

Time Required

This lesson is expected to require a minimum of 8 hours of class time.

Materials and Resources

NOTE: You will need to have Adobe Acrobat installed on your computer to access the Student Worksheets. You may download Adobe Acrobat free of charge at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>.

For this lesson you will need:

1. Computers connected to the internet for conducting research and to access "The First Measured

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Century" website.

2. Television, VCR, and videotape of the first hour of "The First Measured Century," which can be purchased at <http://www.shop.pbs.org>, ordered by phone by calling 1-800-PLAY-PBS, or recorded during the broadcast:

The First Measured Century Premieres on PBS Wednesday December 20th, 2000 from 8:30 to 11:30 PM Check your local listings at:
<http://www.pbs.org/whatson/index.html>

Schools are permitted to tape The First Measured Century and use the program for educational purposes for one year following each PBS broadcast. Additional information about teacher taping rights can be found at PBSTeachersource:

http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/copyright/copyright_trights.shtm.

Teaching Strategy

Class Session 1

1. Two segments will be shown for this lesson: the [Scientific Racism](#) segment, which deals with hardships and racism that immigrants faced; and the [Children's Bureau](#) segment, which presents hardships and efforts to improve quality of life. Prepare for the lesson by queuing "The First Measured Century" tape 1 to the "Scientific Racism" segment which is approximately 16 minutes into the tape and begins with Ben Wattenberg played bocce in Little Italy. The first segment last about 18 minutes. The second segment begins with Ben holding babies to begin the next segment. The Children's Bureau segment last around 14 minutes and ends at the point where Ben rides onto the set in a Ford Model T for the next segment.

2. Distribute the [handout](#) to the students and hold a previewing discussion using the questions students will need to consider and take notes on while watching the video.

3. Show the two segments of "The First Measured Century" video. The students should take notes while watching the video so they can fill in their worksheets afterwards. You may wish to stop the video to discuss topics during the viewing.

4. As an alternative or in addition to viewing the video, information such as the program transcript, expert interviews and data about immigrants can be found at The First Measured Century website at www.pbs.org/fmc.

5. Provide remaining class time for students to complete the worksheet questions. Offer to discuss questions students may have in order to enhance understanding.

6. Students may complete the worksheet for homework if necessary.

Class Sessions 2 and 3

1. If desired, view or read "The Melting Pot." Otherwise, describe the play, summarizing the play and its meaning as described in the following steps.

2. Review the basic point that Zangwill is trying to make in his play: "The Melting Pot." Zangwill's

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basic point is that the old feuds of European groups have no meaning in the new country, America, and should be abandoned. These old feuds should be left behind as immigrants lose their old national identities and become Americans.

“Englishmen and Irishmen, Frenchmen and Germans, Russians and Jew, drop your ancient quarrels and become Americans.”

-- Israel Zangwill

3. Discuss the context in which Zangwill is trying to make his point:

Zangwill made his point in the context of a version of the Romeo and Juliet story, where a boy and a girl fall in love but are from feuding groups. In Zangwill's telling, the boy and girl come from Russian Jewish parents and Russian Cossack parents, groups that fought for centuries in Russia. A couple from these two groups could not possibly be happy if they enacted their groups feud after they got married.

What Zangwill tried to tell the audience was that immigrants were like these two lovers. They couldn't be happy in America unless they gave up the hatreds of the "Old Country."

4. In preparation for writing their plays, break the students into groups of about six students per group for the following pre-writing activities.

Develop The Setting:

Discuss with students development of an appropriate setting for the play. Each group has the assignment of figuring out a situation in which Zangwill's quote makes sense. What the students should do is place this speech in a setting where it makes sense. The setting can be romantic, just as Zangwill's own setting. But it could be a work setting. For example, Irishmen and Englishmen are brawling instead of working on the first skyscraper. Or Germans and Frenchmen are arguing about land (in Europe) instead of printing the newspaper they both work at. Or an educational setting: Poles and Hungarians could be yelling at each other instead listening to their settlement house instructor teach them American government to pass the citizenship test.

Develop Primary Characters:

Discuss with students character ideas. Settlement house workers could be mediators in the play, explaining to both groups the futility of their quarrel. Or the speech can be given by a long-time resident of America. Or by an immigrant who just arrived and can't believe she is seeing the same hatreds that she hoped she had left behind.

Research:

Discuss with students ways to integrate statistical information into the play as supporting arguments for "The Melting Pot" theory being expressed by the characters in the play. You may provide information or reference books for students to acquire data from if computers are not available.

Class Sessions 4, 5 and 6

1. Each group of students needs to produce a written script of their play. At a minimum, they should have character names and dialogue. With more time, the students could add direction, scenery, lighting, etc. Students will need to do different things while developing the play. At a minimum, one or two students need to be responsible for getting the text of the play written down.

*Adjust time to provide additional class time if costumes or props are being created.

Class Sessions 7 and 8

1. Each group of students performs their play for the class. This can be as simple as having members of the group read the various characters' lines. Or it could be much more elaborate, with staging, props, etc.

2. Conduct follow up when performances are completed.

In order to relate Zangwill's play to current issues, discuss ways in which Zangwill's play speaks to us today.

- What modern relevance does Zangwill's play have?
- Today, large numbers of immigrants from many different lands are again coming to America. They bring with them their hopes, fears, skills, and hatreds. Should they continue to pursue old vendettas on new soil? Should Jewish immigrants to America fight with Arab immigrants over land issues in the mid-East? Should immigrants from India and Pakistan to Silicon Valley argue instead of writing software? When the son of Korean immigrants falls in love with the daughter of immigrants from Japan, should their parents try to re-fight the Second World War?
- Can immigrants really become Americans without abandoning the animosities of another time and place?

Review the [Census 2000](#) segment of the program to see how statistics and attitudes about immigrants have changed.

Assessment Recommendations

1. Students should all participate in the discussion. You may wish to call on students who do not volunteer questions or responses during the discussion. Students should be able to provide thoughtful responses to the discussion questions.

2. Evaluate the worksheet responses for appropriate answers. You may allow students to use the companion website at <http://www.pbs.org/fmc> to find information if necessary.

3. Each group's play should be assessed for how well the students fit Zangwill's message into an appropriate context, how well characters of the time are presented, the amount of research conducted by students, and how well supporting data or other information is integrated into the play.

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4. Observe how well students communicate, resolve differences and work together to write and perform the play.
5. Evaluate how well students portray their character in the play.

Related Links

Superb websites of resources about immigration to the United States;

The official Teacher Resources page at the U.S. Government's Immigration and Naturalization Service: <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/history/teacher/Resources.htm>

The Library of Congress webpage on "Immigration in American Memory":
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/immig/immig.html>

The National Immigration Forum
<http://www.immigrationforum.org/>

Superb website about Jane Addams and Hull House:
http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/hull_house.html

Extensions

You may expand this lesson in stages from small plays read by small groups of students all the way up to a full-blown theatre production that is performed on stage with lighting, direction, costumes, props, etc.

Adaptations

The plays themselves can be about the present, rather than 1900. Of course, the situations will be different and the ethnicities of the immigrants will probably be different. You may find out more information about current immigrants by having a look at the [Census 2000](#) segment.

Another possible adaptation is to have the class perform Zangwill's play.

Relevant Standards

National Standards for Arts Education

From http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/professional_resources/standards

Grades 6-8

Content Standard #1: Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Achievement Standard:

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- Students individually and in groups, create characters, environments, and actions that create tension and suspense
- Students refine and record dialogue and action

Content Standard #5: Researching by using cultural and historical information to support improvised and scripted scenes

Achievement Standard:

- Students apply research from print and nonprint sources to script writing, acting, design, and directing choices

Grades 9-12

Content Standard #1: Script writing through improvising, writing, and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Achievement Standard, Proficient:

- Students construct imaginative scripts and collaborate with actors to refine scripts so that story and meaning are conveyed to an audience

Content Standard #5: Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices

Achievement Standard, Proficient:

- Students identify and research cultural, historical, and symbolic clues in dramatic texts, and evaluate the validity and practicality of the information to assist in making artistic choices for informal and formal productions

National Standards for History

From the National Center for History in the Schools (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs>)

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions