

Immigration

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

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Introduction

Primary sources are the building blocks of history. Using these sources to introduce students to historical periods offers students the opportunity to become historians themselves—to analyze the evidence, form hypotheses, and learn how to support arguments based on evidence. They learn what it means to interpret the past in ways that provide meaning for the present. Textual primary sources can often be difficult for students to engage with because they are often couched in unfamiliar language from a different historical era. Visual primary sources can prove more appealing and accessible to students, and they also involve different types of “reading” skills.

How to Use This Product

This PowerPoint® presentation is designed to walk students through the process of primary source interpretation. Slides help to focus students’ attention and train them how to “read” visual primary sources. Targeted questions and enlarged insets from images help to train students to see deeper into the historical record, to uncover evidence that, though plainly before their eyes, is not always obvious at first glance.

The posters provide visual reinforcement for the images analyzed in the presentation. Use them before or after the PowerPoint® analysis for either pre- or post-reading activities. In addition, we have provided extra images on each disc so that once the students are trained in the skills of analyzing visual primary sources they can further hone their skills. You can print them out and distribute as handouts for in-class or independent study, or you can import the images into PowerPoint® for students to analyze individually or with the class as a whole.

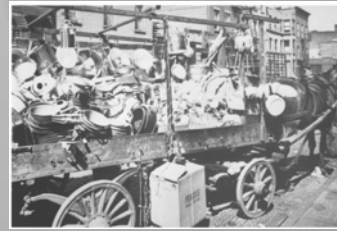
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We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
Chief Education Officer
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Analyzing Visual Primary Sources



Immigration

1

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Immigration to the United States rose sharply beginning in the 1840s, particularly as a result of the Irish potato famine and other agricultural and political disruptions in Europe. Most immigrants between 1840 and 1890 came from Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland. Beginning in 1850, many Chinese also came to the United States. Chinese immigrants made the journey to escape political turmoil in China; many found work in the western United States building railroads, working in mines, and operating stores in cities.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most immigrants to the United States came from southern and eastern Europe. These Europeans sought economic opportunities that were not available in their home countries. Millions of Jewish immigrants also arrived seeking freedom from religious persecution.

Many Italian and Eastern European immigrants came to the United States to work for a while with the expectation that they would return home with money to support their families. The Jews were the exception, as they generally sought to flee religious persecution and therefore did not intend to return to Europe. They would often bring their entire family at once. For immigrants in general, it was common for one family member to emigrate first and to later send for other family members.

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- The Journey
- Ellis Island
- Immigrant Enclaves and Tenement Life
- Immigrants at Work
- Anti-Immigration

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This presentation will discuss several aspects of immigrant life from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries.

The Journey

- Purchasing tickets for the passage
- Waiting to board the ship
- Conditions onboard the ship
- Steerage

3

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Immigrants generally had little difficulty purchasing a ticket for passage on a ship to the United States. Shipping companies had agents who traveled around Europe selling tickets. After 1900, potential immigrants also had to obtain passports and visas to the United States.

Passengers often waited in boarding houses at the port until their ship was ready to depart. They received medical examinations and were required to answer a series of questions about their marital status, financial status, health, and other issues.

Conditions onboard the ship were, for most immigrants, abysmal. This was particularly true in third class, also known as steerage, which was the least expensive way to cross the Atlantic. Most immigrants to the United States came in steerage. Steerage passengers generally stayed on the ship's crowded lower decks. People slept in narrow berths very close to one another. The trip from Europe to New York averaged two weeks, so passengers experienced a considerable amount of discomfort along the way. Seasickness and cold weather did not help in this regard.

Those immigrants who could afford first- or second-class passage experienced much better conditions.



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The Journey

Give students about one minute to look at this poster, then move on to the following slides.

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- Do you think the passengers on this ship were wealthy or poor?
- What clues do you see in the picture that might help you answer this question?

These passengers were most likely poor and were traveling in steerage. Certain clues in the picture tip us off to this: the passengers are crowded together, they are wearing shawls and blankets for warmth rather than expensive coats, and they are sitting on a part of the ship's deck rather than in nice chairs.

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- What might the weather have been like on deck when this picture was taken?
- How can you tell?



The weather appears to have been cold on this day. The journey across the Atlantic could be cold at any time of year. In the winter, temperatures often hovered near freezing. The ships were generally not well-heated. These women appear to be snuggling together for warmth. The shawls over their heads probably reflect both the acceptable fashion for their culture and an attempt to stay warm. The women and other people on the deck also have blankets. The Statue of Liberty welcomes the “huddled masses”; this seems to be an apt description for this group of passengers.