Love Thy Neighbor: Immigration and the U.S. Experience

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR PRE- OR POST-VISIT

Examine the experience of immigrants in the United States, using artifacts from the Museum’s collection.
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We look forward to welcoming you and your students to the Museum for the tour Love Thy Neighbor: Immigration and the U.S. Experience. During the tour, students will examine artifacts in order to learn more about the reasons people immigrate and the experience of immigrants in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. Below are activities you may use with your students before or after your Museum visit. We hope that you find these useful and that they enhance your students’ understanding of the content discussed during the tour.

ACTIVITY: ARTIFACT EXPLORATION

Bringing artifacts into the classroom is an excellent way to engage students in learning. One way to do this is to use artifacts available on the Museum’s online collection. This gives students the opportunity to examine artifacts in great detail, using inquiry-based methods, as well as to view artifacts that may not be on display currently at the Museum.

We’ve included some small images in this guide so that you may preview the artifacts. To view larger images of these artifacts, visit collection.mjhnyc.org and type the artifact’s ID number in the search box. Many of these artifacts are also available on the iPad app The New Immigrants: NYC 1880 – 1924, developed by the New York City Department of Education featuring more than 100 artifacts, including many from the Museum’s collection.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Make inferences and draw conclusions about historical content and individual experiences through artifact study
- Examine the experience of immigrants in the United States
- Nuance their concept of what it means to be an American and maintain one’s heritage
- Explore options available to new immigrants in the United States and the skills needed (or not needed) to access those options in the 19th and 20th centuries
**NYC Social Studies Scope and Sequence:**
4.3b, 4.6d, 4.6f, 4.7a, 8.2, 8.8a, 8.8b, 11.5b, 11.7a, 11.10b

**Common Core State Standards:**
RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.6, RI.7, RI.8, RI.9, RH.1, RH.2, RH.4, RH.6, RH.7, RH.8, RH.9, WI.9

**PROCEDURE**

We recommend that you introduce these artifacts in one of the following ways:

- Without giving any information about the artifact, encourage students to make inferences on their own, based on what they see and their prior knowledge. Provide students with the below guiding questions for each artifact (but not the answers).

- Students should present their hypotheses, and then the instructor can supplement their inferences with correct information about the artifacts and their historical context.

- The questions below align with the Social Studies Scope and Sequence. We suggest that you modify or adjust the questions as needed to best suit the students in your classroom, taking into account grade level, learning styles, and reading and writing skills. These can be used as discussion questions or as writing prompts for individual or group work.

**SOME FURTHER EXTENSION ACTIVITIES COULD INCLUDE:**

- Ask students to select three or four artifacts that they might see in one gallery or case at a museum, organized by a unifying theme. Students can give this gallery or case a title and write one to two paragraphs explaining the unifying theme and tying in relevant outside historical information.

- For classrooms with students who may have close relatives who are immigrants, or who are themselves immigrants, ask each student to bring in an artifact from their own lives that is indicative of the immigrant experience in their families. Students can write artifact “labels,” as if they were going to be displayed in a museum, to describe their artifact and its significance to their family. Have students present their artifacts to their classmates. To present their artifacts, students can engage in a gallery walk in the classroom to view each other’s artifacts.
**Artifact:**
*“Our Union at Work” Booklet*
**ID:** 1939.91

1. Describe the cover – who is pictured here? Who is featured prominently? What are they doing? [Workers. Women are featured prominently. One is at a sewing machine, another is handling fabric.]

2. Explain: what does the text on the cover reveal about who these people are? [Workers, union members (specifically the International Ladies Garment Workers Union).]

3. Many immigrants entered the garment industry – why? [Could learn the skills easily, didn’t need to know English well to do the job, it was what was available to them.]

4. Why would workers unionize? What role did unions play in protecting workers’ rights? Why might this be especially important to new immigrants? [To fight for safer working conditions and better pay, to have advocates protecting them, to receive further training and other benefits.]

**Artifact:**
*Photograph of Dr. Rose Stavisker Fischman at Graduation*
**ID:** 2000.P.155

1. What event is this photograph commemorating? How can you tell? [Graduation, wearing graduation robes.]

2. This photograph was taken in 1905 – how does that change your perception of this photo? [It was not common in that era for women to graduate from higher education.]

3. This is Dr. Rose Stavisker Fischman She was an immigrant, originally from Poland. What do people need in order to pursue higher education, like Dr. Fischman did, and why might this be challenging for an immigrant? [She would need the money/resources to attend school, have learned English well enough to be successful in an academic setting, etc.]
**Artifact:**
Statue of Liberty Menorah
ID: 923.98

**Alternate:**
Liberty Bell Menorah,
ID: 2002.A.176

1. What is this object? What is used for? [Menorah, used on Hanukkah to light candles for the holiday.]

2. What American symbol do you notice? What does it represent? [Statue of Liberty, represents freedom and welcoming new immigrants or Liberty Bell, an important symbol of American freedom that is found in Philadelphia.]

3. Explain: what does this illustrate about heritage and culture? Can a person be American, while still identifying with another culture within the American identity? What does this say about being American?

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**Artifact:**
Kamenetzky Bros. announces name change to M. Kamen and Brothers
ID: 1239.91

1. What is the card announcing, and to whom? [Announcing the change of the business’s name to clients.]

2. Why is this business owner changing his name? [His real name is too difficult for many people.]

3. Infer what this tells us about the immigrant experience. How did other perceive new immigrants? How might changing a name have benefited someone at the time? How might a person feel about changing their name? [Many immigrants changed their names to Americanize/assimilate into American culture, and to get rid of “foreign” sounding names.]
**Artifact:**
**English for Coming Citizens**
**ID: 66.97**

1. What symbol do you see on the cover of this book? What does it represent? [The Statue of Liberty, freedom and the promise of the United States.]

2. For whom is the book intended? [Immigrants, specifically adults, learning English.]

3. Why would learning English be important to new immigrants? What would English allow them access to? [Education, other jobs, making daily life easier, etc.]

4. Despite learning English, why would some immigrants continue to speak and read in their first language(s) at home or within their communities? [To preserve cultural identity, it may be easier to speak/read in your first language, to accommodate relatives who have not learned English as well.]

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**Artifact:**
**Food Will Win the War (poster)**
**ID: 2599.89**

1. Describe the poster: what images do you see? What language(s)? [Yiddish]

2. This poster is encouraging Americans help the war effort during WWI. Identical posters were created in Italian and English. Why would the posters be created in languages other than English? [To reach immigrant communities.]

3. How might participation in the war effort affect immigrants’ pride in being American?
**Artifact:**
*Family Tree in English and Hebrew*
**ID:** 2001.A.446

1. Describe this object – what is it? Who might have made it and why? [Family tree, records names of family members and shows how they are connected.]

2. What do you notice about the languages used? Infer what this means about this family. [English and Hebrew – this family is Jewish. This family, the Schachter family, is an American Jewish family that is originally from Poland.]

3. Discuss: Do you believe it is important for us to remember who are ancestors are, as well as where they are from? Why? What other things can we do to remember our ancestors?

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**Artifact:**
*Rosh Hashanah Card in the form of a ship ticket*
**ID:** 67.90

1. Describe the symbols do you see in this illustration. What do they represent?

2. What languages do you see here? [Yiddish, Hebrew]

3. Infer: what might the ship ticket represent? Why would someone design a card for the Jewish New Year (called Rosh Hashanah) in this way? [It could represent a new life / new beginning.]
**Artifact:**
**Adult Education Certificate of Abram Greene**
**ID: 132.92**

1. Examine this certificate: who received it? [Abraham, or Abram, Greene]

2. How and when did he earn it? What course did he take? [Adult education courses at night, specifically “Americanization.”]

3. Infer: what was the purpose of a course in “Americanization”? Why would someone want to have taken this course? [He may want to fit in better in his new country.]

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**Artifact:**
**Illustration Welcoming Immigrants**
**ID: 2003.A.26**

1. Describe the people on the left side of the drawing. What are they doing? What message are they trying to communicate to the others on the right? [Holding arms open in a welcoming gesture towards the others.]

2. What other symbol do you see? [Eagle with American flag colors.]

3. Describe how the people in this illustration are dressed – what differences to you see between the right and left sides? What does this indicate? [Those on the left are dressed differently than the immigrants on the right. They wearing clothes that were in style for the time period, suggesting that they are acculturated/assimilated into American mainstream culture.]

4. What is the message of this drawing? [Those already in the United States should welcome new immigrants from Europe.]
EXAMINING PRIMARY SOURCES AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

The following activities were originally developed for the Museum’s special exhibition, *Against the Odds: American Jews and the Rescue of Europe’s Refugees, 1933-1941*. Between 1933 and 1941, thousands of Jews in flight from Nazi persecution sought haven in the United States, reaching out to relatives, friends, and even strangers. *Against the Odds* tells the story of American Jews who answered their call for help. Working within the constraints of American laws that strictly limited immigration, these generous individuals overcame tremendous obstacles to help many of the refugees reach safety.

These activities are most appropriate for middle and high school students. Learn more about the exhibition and view its artifacts by visiting [www.mjhnyc.org/againsttheodds](http://www.mjhnyc.org/againsttheodds).

**Public Opinion**

**Common Core State Standards:**
- RH.6-8.7
- RI.8.7
- RH.11-12.7
- RI.11-12.7

**OBJECTIVES:**
- Students will learn about the circumstances that increased emigration from Germany and Austria in 1938.
- Students will compare and contrast predictions with fact, noting discrepancies.
- Students will draw conclusions based on information and data provided.
- Students will examine public opinion of the United States from 1938 and conclude how it may have influenced politicians at the time.
- Students will interpret graphs and create visual representations of data.

**VOCABULARY:**
- **Kristallnacht** – government sanctioned attacks on Jews and Jewish property, November 9 and 10, 1938, in which thousands of Jews were arrested, killed or imprisoned in concentration camps.
- **Visa** – permission to enter another country as an immigrant or visitor.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**
- On *Kristallnacht* (November 9-10, 1938), government sanctioned anti-Jewish rioters, led by the police, attacked and destroyed some 1,400 synagogues, Jewish-owned shops, and Jewish homes across Germany and Austria.
• 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps, and 91 Jews were murdered.

• Jews had no authorities to turn to, since their government was persecuting them instead of protecting them.

• Kristallnacht convinced most of the remaining Jews in Germany and Austria that there was no future for them in Germany and Austria. They crowded into American consulates, applying to immigrate.

• The U.S. had established immigration quotas in the 1920s to limit immigrants by country, ending the period of open immigration that existed before that time. Until 1938, State Department officials, in an effort to limit immigration to the United States, which was suffering from economic depression and lack of jobs, did not issue as many visas as were allowed by the quota system. When Germany annexed Austria in 1938, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt combined the quotas for Germany and Austria, as Austria was now under German control, and instructed the State Department to issue all the visas allowed by the quotas. This was helpful to visa applicants, but still inadequate.

• Because of the Great Depression in the U.S. at the time, Americans were concerned that an influx of new immigrants would take away needed jobs. This led to very strong anti-immigrant sentiment. Most Americans favored isolationism and did not believe the United States should become involved in other countries’ issues.

**Activity:**

In 1938, a public opinion poll in the United States asked the following two questions regarding refugees:

• What is your attitude toward allowing German, Austrian, and other political refugees to come into the U.S.?
  - With conditions as they are, we should try and keep them out
  - Allow them to come, but not raise quotas
  - Undecided
  - We should encourage them to come, even if we have to raise our immigration quotas

• If you were a member of Congress, would you vote yes or no on a bill to open the doors of the U.S. to a larger number of European refugees than are now admitted under our immigration quotas
  - With conditions as they are, we should try and keep them out
  - Allow them to come, but not raise quotas
  - Undecided
PROCEDURE:

- Students predict what percentage of the public responded with each of the given answers to the poll questions.
- Students create a graph, chart, or other visual representation to represent their predictions.
- After making predictions and completing visual representations, students are provided with the actual percentages for each response of the American public in 1938 (see actual survey results, below).
- Students create a graph, chart, or other visual representation to represent the actual responses.
- In writing, students explain why they predicted the responses they did, compare how their predictions differed from the actual percentages (if at all), and conclude what the polls tell us about U.S. public opinion at this time.
- In addition, taking into consideration the background information about President Roosevelt consolidating the German and Austrian quotas, students should apply information from the 1938 poll to conclude whether and how U.S. public opinion influenced politics at the time.
- Students may work individually or in groups.
- To wrap up the activity, students can report to the class.

ACTUAL SURVEY RESULTS:

What is your attitude toward allowing German, Austrian, and other political refugees to come into the U.S.?

- With conditions as they are, we should try and keep them out – 67%
- Allow them to come, but not raise quotas – 18%
- Undecided – 10%
- We should encourage them to come, even if we have to raise our immigration quotas – 5%

If you were a member of Congress, would you vote yes or no on a bill to open the doors of the U.S. to a larger number of European refugees than are now admitted under our immigration quotas?

- No – 83%
- Yes – 9%
- Undecided – 8%
**“DEAR MISS MARY”**

**Common Core State Standards:**
- RH.6-8.1          RI.8.1          RH.11-12.1          RI.11-12.1
- RH.6-8.2          RI.8.2          RH.11-12.2          RI.11-12.4
- RH.6-8.4          RI.8.8          RH.11-12.4          W.11-12.9
- RH.6-8.6          W.8.9          RH.11-12.9
- RH.6-8.9

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will analyze a primary source informational text to find key details, make inferences, and draw conclusions, integrating their knowledge of history.
- Students will cite specific evidence from a text to support claims.
- Students will learn about world events of 1938 and how they affected refugees.
- Students will explore actions taken by refugees to help their emigration to the United States.

**VOCABULARY:**

- **Anschluss**: German word for annexation. German armed forces entered Austria and incorporated Austria into Germany.
- **Visa**: permission to enter another country as an immigrant or visitor
- **Affidavit**: a legal document that an American who sponsored an immigrant to the United States signed, promising that he would take financial responsibility for the immigrant, so the immigrant would not become a “public charge,” dependent on public funds

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

- The violence of the events of 1938 shattered any illusion that Jews might be able to endure Hitler’s rule.
- On March 12, 1938, Germany annexed Austria. The Anschluss brought an additional 185,000 Jews under Nazi control.
- Applying for a visa to come to the United States was difficult and time consuming. Applicants were required to submit detailed personal and financial documentation and affidavits of financial support from citizens or permanent residents of the United States.
- This activity uses an excerpt of a letter from Moses Heller to Mary Mills, a young, non-Jewish American from South Carolina. They met at a dance when Mary visited Vienna the year before.
- He wrote to her days after the Anschluss, on March 23, 1938, asking for her help in sponsoring
him to come to the United States. He used a phrasebook and dictionary to help him write the
letter, as his English skills were extremely limited.

• Mary went to a wealthy Jewish businessman in town and asked him to help. He agreed, and
sponsored Moses, his parents and his sister.

• Through her efforts and connections, his whole family escaped.

• Some spelling and grammatical errors are corrected for clarity, but the content of the letter is
unchanged.

**ACTIVITY:**

Students read and analyze the letter, performing a close reading to study and analyze the text.

• Students use the questions provided to analyze the text, citing specific lines from the text

• To help scaffold students who struggle to identify the lines, provide the line numbers (or range
of lines) where the answers may be found as guidance

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS:**

1. What did Moses give Mary in Vienna?
   Moses gave Mary a photograph of himself in Vienna.

2. What does he ask that she gives him? What does he tell her that she needs to say in this document?
   He asks her for an affidavit of support, and asks that she say that she can provide him with a job once
   he is in the United States.

3. What information does he provide for her? Why was this important?
   He provides her with his address. This is important so that she can respond to his letter and send him
   the affidavit.

4. Do you think Mary would have been able to be a sponsor for Moses? Why or why not? If not,
   what circumstances may have prevented her from doing so?
   Mary probably would not be able to sponsor him, as she could not prove that she had the income to
   support a refugee.

5. Why do you think Moses chose to write to Mary? What does this say about the options he had
   for sponsorship?
   She may have been the only American that he knew. He had very limited options for sponsorship.
   Since he wrote to someone he'd only met once, this likely meant that he knew no one else in the United
   States that he could turn to for help.

6. How do you think the Anschluss affected Moses’s decision to write to Mary?
   Nazi policy now affected Jews in Austria, meaning that Moses was now affected by this policy. He no
   longer had a job and had no future in Austria. He hoped to find a job and a better future in America.
Moses (Max) Heller met a young American woman named Mary Mills in Vienna in 1937. After the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, he reached out to her to see if she could provide help for him and his family. Below is an excerpt of the letter. Some spelling and grammatical errors have been corrected for clarity, but the content is unchanged.

Vienna 23 March 38

Dear Miss Mary:

I don’t know if you remember at me. I [...] know you, as you [were] in Vienna in [summer] 1937, and [I gave] you a picture from me. Do you remember, you [were at a] dance[...] I promised you, to write [once] my English is better, but I didn’t learn more, and so, my English is bad how so ever.

Now I have a great beg to you! I am here without position, and would be [glad] to [come] to U.S.A. I was [at] the Consulate and [was told], that I can [come to the United States], if somebody guaran-
teed for me. I please you from heart if you can write me, that you will help me. I hope that [I] can work[...] From you I would nothing desire. Perhaps can you help me, I wouldn’t forget it. I hope that you’ll answer me, if yes or no. If yes, you have to write, that you have [a] job for me. I send you our information which I have got of the Consulate. My name and [address] is:

Moses Heller, Wien. II. Unt. Augartenstrasse 8/23

[...]At finish, I beg you to excuse my very, very bad English, but I’ll now [really] learn.
I finish with the best regards to you

M Heller

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the following questions, using the letter and your knowledge of history. Cite the specific line(s) from the letter to support your answers.

1. What did Moses (Max) give Mary in Vienna?
2. What does he ask that she gives him? What does he tell her that she needs to say in this document?
3. What information does he provide for her? Why was this important?
4. Do you think Mary would have been able to be a sponsor for Moses? Why or why not? If not, what circumstances may have prevented her from doing so?
5. Why do you think Moses chose to write to Mary? What does this say about the options he had for sponsorship?
6. How do you think the Anschluss affected Moses’s decision to write to Mary?

**What happened to Moses Heller?**

Mary Mills was unable to provide sponsorship, but she did find someone who could. She contacted a prominent Jewish businessman in the town, who was able to provide an affidavit for Moses’ entire family. They were all able to come to the United States.
SEEKING HELP

Common Core State Standards:
RH.6-8.1  RI.8.1  RH.11-12.1  RI.11-12.1
RH.6-8.2  RI.8.2  RH.11-12.2  RI.11-12.4
RH.6-8.4  RI.8.8  RH.11-12.4  W.11-12.9
RH.6-8.6  W.8.9  RH.11-12.9
RH.6-8.9

OBJECTIVES:

• Students will analyze a primary source text to find information, make inferences, and draw conclusions, integrating their knowledge of history.

• Students will examine actions taken by Jews to find refuge.

• Students will explore the efforts made by American Jews to help European Jewish refugees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

• Max Last was the oldest of four children who lived with his parents in Leipzig, Germany.

• He had heard about a David Kestenbaum who provided affidavits for Jews desperately trying to get out of Germany. An affidavit was a legal document that an American who sponsored an immigrant to the United States signed, promising that he would take financial responsibility for the immigrant, so the immigrant would not become a “public charge,” dependent on public funds.

• Max didn’t have an address for Mr. Kestenbaum, but he was able to look the name up in a telephone book. Max wrote at least two letters to the two David Kestenbaums he found listed, hoping one of them was the David Kestenbaum who might send an affidavit for his family.

• David Kestenbaum and his brother Jacob had earned a reputation for responding to every request from refugees looking for sponsorship or assistance. The brothers issued hundreds of affidavits to extended family, friends, and total strangers, and encouraged others to serve as sponsors.

• Several secretaries worked with the Kestenbaums to manage their voluminous immigration-related correspondence and keep track of more than 700 case files. The files include 358 separate affidavits, representing attempts to bring 873 people to the United States. The Kestenbaums’ efforts were not always successful. It is impossible to determine exactly how many people they ultimately brought to the United States because some of the files are incomplete.

• The “wrong” David Kestenbaum, an accountant, received this letter. He forwarded the letter to the David Kestenbaum who was providing affidavits.
ACTIVITY:

- This is a translation of Max Last’s letter, written in 1939. The format has been modified for ease of reading, but the content is unchanged.
- Bolded words are vocabulary words that students should look up before reading the letter in order to facilitate understanding
- Students use the questions provided to perform a close reading of the letter, citing specific lines to support their answers.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

1. What are three facts that Max lists about himself?
   Max states that he is fourteen, that he has missed three months of school (and is unable to obtain any schooling), and that he has three siblings.

2. Why is Max reaching out to a stranger? What does this say about the urgency to leave Europe for refugees like Max and his family? What does this say about the role refugees played in their own rescue?
   Max is reaching out to a stranger because he doesn’t know anyone in the United States, and an acquaintance told him that the Kestenbaums might be able to help. This shows that there was great urgency at this time. Many people reached out to total strangers in the hope that they would receive help. This shows that refugees were resourceful and creative in their efforts to find a safe haven.

3. How does Max describe his parents? Why do you think he mentions this?
   Max says that his parents are industrious and would “shirk from no job”. He mentions this because refugees needed to prove that they would be able to support themselves and not “become a public charge,” relying on the government for financial support.

4. This letter was written in 1939. What historical events happened around this time? How might they have affected Max and his family? How might these events have increased their urgency to leave Germany?
   By 1938, Jewish children had been expelled from public schools in Germany, and for most, their education stopped. In November 1938, the violent attacks of Kristallnacht were a turning point for Jews in Germany, and many more tried to leave. In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, starting World War II.
Max Last was the oldest of four children who lived with their parents in Leipzig, Germany. He wrote at least two letters to different people named David Kestenbaum, hoping to find the one he was told might send an affidavit for his family. David Kestenbaum and his brother, Jacob, fur dealers who lived in Brooklyn, provided affidavits of support for refugees.

The “wrong” David Kestenbaum, an accountant, received this letter. He forwarded the letter to the David Kestenbaum who was providing affidavits.

Below is a translation of Max’s 1939 letter. The format has been modified for ease of reading, but the content is unchanged. Bolded words are vocabulary words to look up before you read this letter, in order to help your understanding of it.

Most honored Mr. Kestenbaum:

An acquaintance told me about you suggesting that I get in touch with you. I hope that you might be able to help me and my family. I am 14 years old and have already missed three months of school. I am unable to obtain any kind of schooling, which causes me great distress.

I have three siblings, two brothers aged 11, and 12, and a sister, 4. My parents are at a total loss about how to obtain an affidavit. If it is impossible to get an affidavit for the whole family then at least for us children. Do have [pity] for us and help us quickly. You would be doing a great Mitzva [good deed] since we are stateless and we have no one to turn to.

My parents are industrious workers, they shirk from no job. We do not require money, only papers [an affidavit]. Please help us since our situation is desperate. May God protect you from a similar situation. Hoping that you will have pity on us and you will communicate with us quickly. I thank you in the name of my parents and siblings.

Your devoted, Max Last.

On the back, Max listed the family members’ names and birthdays.

**ACTIVITY:** Using the letter, answer the following questions. Cite the line(s) of the letter that support your answer.

1. What are three facts that Max lists about himself?
2. Why is Max reaching out to a stranger? What does this say about the urgency to leave Europe for Jewish refugees like Max and his family? What does this say about the role refugees played in their own rescue?
3. How does Max describe his parents? Why do you think he mentions this?
4. This letter was written in 1939. What historical events happened around this time? How might they have affected Max and his family? How might they have increased their urgency to leave Germany?
What happened to Max Last?
David Kestenbaum completed an affidavit for the Last family, but there are notes in the file indicating that Max Last did not provide a return address, so the affidavit was never sent. It is not known what happened to the envelope in which the letter was mailed. Max, his parents, and at least one sibling perished. His brother, Joachim, survived.
LETTER FROM ALBERT EINSTEIN
TO ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, JULY 26, 1941

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will analyze a primary source informational text to find key details, make inferences, and draw conclusions, integrating their knowledge of history.
- Students will learn about American immigration policy in 1941, including factors that made admission to the United States more difficult.
- Students will understand how world events influenced United States policy.

VOCABULARY:

- **Consul**: A State Department official represents the American government in a foreign country. American consuls determined who should get a visa to enter the United States.
- **Consulate**: The office of the American government in a foreign country.
- **Neutral countries**: Countries who were not allied either with Germany or the Allies.
- **Visa**: Permission to enter a country.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- In 1941, as World War II escalated in Europe, the U.S. State Department instructed American consuls in Europe to deny immigration visas to anyone who would leave close relatives in countries under German occupation. American officials claimed the Nazis might blackmail refugees to act on behalf of Germany once they reached the United States, and also maintained that Nazi spies might pose as refugees.
- In the spring of 1941, as America's entry into the war approached, the U.S. closed its consulates in Nazi-occupied countries. Prospective immigrants had to reach consulates in neutral countries to complete their visa application process.
- In July 1941, visa control was transferred from overseas consuls and centralized in Washington, D.C. The U.S. State Department voided visa applications that were in progress but not completed. Applicants had to start the whole process anew, submitting new forms with more detailed biographical information, new affidavits from two sponsors, with two character references for each sponsor, who had to provide a list of previous affidavits they supplied, plus current financial documentation. These additional regulations and delays trapped many Jews in Europe.
- When visa control was centralized in Washington (instead of being handled by consulates...
in Europe), it became clear to U.S. State Department personnel that some sponsors had sent multiple affidavits to different consulates. They questioned sponsors’ ability to uphold numerous financial obligations. Some sponsors who had been able to save many Jewish refugees could no longer provide affidavits of support because of this concern.

- Albert Einstein was in the United States in 1933 when the Nazi Party came to power in Germany. He was told that the Nazis wanted to arrest him, so he decided not to return to Germany. He became an American citizen in 1940.

- Once in the U.S., Albert Einstein tried to help other European Jews immigrate. He provided affidavits for some, participated in fundraising efforts to help them, and wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady. This is a letter that he wrote to her in 1941 to express his distress about the new, stricter State Department policy that instructed consuls to deny visas to anyone with relatives remaining in Germany.

**ACTIVITY:**

Students read the letter from Albert Einstein to Eleanor Roosevelt, performing a close reading to study and analyze the text.

- If it is appropriate for your students, they can use the vocabulary key to check understanding of definitions as a pre-reading activity.

- Students use the questions provided to analyze the text, citing specific lines from the text.

- To help scaffold students who struggle to identify the lines, provide the line numbers (or range of lines) where the answers may be found as guidance.

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS:**

1. Why did Albert Einstein choose to write to the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt?
   
   Albert Einstein chose to write to the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, because she “always stand[s] for the right and humaneness even when it is hard”. He also states that he does not know of anyone else to whom he can turn for help. He also hopes that she will bring his concerns to the attention of her husband, the President.

2. How does Einstein characterize the State Department policy on immigration?
   
   Einstein characterizes the State Department policy as making it nearly impossible for refugees from Europe to come to the United States. He says that they have created a “wall of bureaucratic measures” to keep potential immigrants out.

3. What justification does Einstein say the State Department is using to explain this policy?
   
   Einstein says that the State Department claims that the policy is necessary “to protect America against subversive, dangerous elements”.

4. What does Einstein hope that Eleanor Roosevelt will do?
   
   Einstein hopes that the Eleanor Roosevelt will speak to someone well-informed about the situation (line 9) and, if she “become[s] convinced that a truly grave injustice is under way,” she will bring it to the attention of her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

I have noted with great satisfaction that you always stand for the right and humaneness even when it is hard. Therefore in my deep concern, I know of no one else to whom to turn for help.

A policy is now being pursued in the State Department which makes it all but impossible to give refuge in America to many worthy persons who are the victims of Fascist cruelty in Europe. Of course, this is not openly avowed by those responsible for it. The method which is being used, however, is to make immigration impossible by creating a wall of bureaucratic measures alleged to be necessary to protect America against subversive, dangerous elements. I would suggest that you talk about this question to some well-informed and right-minded person such as Mr. Hamilton Fish Armstrong*. If then you become convinced that a truly grave injustice is under way, I know that you will find it possible to bring the matter to the attention of your heavily burdened husband in order that it may be remedied.

Very sincerely yours,

Professor Albert Einstein

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the questions below based on the text of the letter and your knowledge of history. Cite specific lines from the letter to support your answers.

1. Why did Albert Einstein choose to write to the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt?
2. How does Einstein characterize the State Department policy towards immigration?
3. What justification does Einstein say the State Department is using to explain this policy?
4. What does Einstein hope that Eleanor Roosevelt will do?

**VOCABULARY**

humaneness  Fascist  avowed
bureaucratic  alleged  subversive
grave  remedied  elements

*Hamilton Fish Armstrong*: a journalist and diplomat, and an influential writer and editor on foreign affairs. He was well acquainted with many prominent Americans, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.